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**Challenging Humanism:
Human-Animal Relations in Recent Postcolonial Novels**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Middlesex University

September 2009

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Abstract

This thesis identifies and examines a conjunction between white postcolonial cultural and species concerns within recent novels from South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The argument takes as a starting point a suggestion by Philip Armstrong that postcolonial and animal studies discourses might form an alliance based on a common antagonist: humanism. Here, this idea is applied in the context of literature by white postcolonial writers. I explore the extent and nature of the alliance and the degree to which it can be called successful within the selected novels.

Each of the five chapters concerns a different text, and the thesis is also divided into two sections. The first addresses the contrasting approaches to humanism and to animals offered by J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001). The second addresses the representation of these themes in Fiona Farrell's *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* (2007), Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* (1999), and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), set in the past, present and future respectively, to illustrate the temporal dimension of the white postcolonial-animal alliance in question.

Overall, the thesis emphasises the relevance of species concerns within white postcolonial culture, and posits the existence of a thread running through contemporary white postcolonial novels in which animals are a priority. All of the novels examined here, I argue, represent animals as more than victims in relation to humanist discourse: they emphasise animals' potential to disrupt that discourse by affecting the attitudes of individual humans or by resisting humanist endeavours by their own actions. The result of this, I suggest, is that animals appear as allies in white postcolonial cultures' attempts at self-definition against historical colonialism and contemporary globalisation, while white postcolonial literature portrays animals in ways that promote positive human perceptions of them.

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Introduction: writing others

In an article entitled ‘Bats in the Gardens’, Helen Tiffin investigates the response to the presence of native Australian fruit bats in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens (an urban space of largely imported European vegetation). Though the bats are protected, Tiffin notes that ‘Their consumption of orchard fruits and fruit in urban gardens ... has often made them unpopular’, and she explains that in the campaign to evict them from the Botanical Gardens, they ‘were ironically depicted as outsiders; invaders, newcomers, vandals destroying “centuries” of *European* culture’.¹ The case that Tiffin describes is revealing of human attitudes to animals on several levels. One important point underscored by the response to the fruit bats is that anthropocentric and imperialistic perspectives often overlap. The idea that nonhuman animals should not be allowed to share spaces that humans want to inhabit or to access resources that humans want for themselves is an example of humans’ common desire to set themselves apart, physically but also conceptually, from other species. At the same time, the opposition to the bats’ presence also has a cultural dimension in that, as Tiffin emphasises, those campaigning for the bats’ removal were largely the descendants of European settlers, wanting to protect their heritage from specifically native species. On the other hand, Tiffin’s own approach shows a clear awareness of the fact that the Australian descendants of settlers are the relative outsiders or newcomers who have invaded, appropriated and vandalised the spaces and resources first used by the bats. It also suggests a certain appreciation of the bats’ own unwitting resistance to those peoples’ interests. In this thesis, I explore how similar sorts of awareness and appreciation are demonstrated in various ways within contemporary ‘white’ postcolonial novels emerging from South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, in what can be regarded as a literary alliance between animal studies and postcolonial discourses.

Cary Wolfe attributes the emergence of the field of animal studies during the past few decades to an intersection between the ‘crisis of humanism’ in critical theory, and the changing place of animals outside the humanities.² Deriving impetus from animal rights and

¹ Helen Tiffin, ‘Bats in the Gardens’, *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 38, 4 (2005): 8, 8-9.

² Cary Wolfe, ed., introduction to *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), x-xi.

environmentalist movements, human-animal relations have become the subject of attention within discourses as wide-ranging as history, anthropology, geography, gender studies, art history and literary criticism.³ The academic field of animal studies encompasses all of these perspectives and more. Meanwhile, in the 2005 edition of *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin observe that ‘Interrogation and exploration of the relationships between powerful human groups and what they have traditionally designated as “animal” is increasingly important in postcolonial studies’.⁴ The issue of species is a sensitive one in this context because, as Etienne Balibar writes, ‘every theoretical racism draws upon *anthropological universals*’, in all of which ‘we can see the persistent presence of the same “question”: that of *the difference between humanity and animality*’.⁵ This is of course an important reason to interrogate human-animal relations, but it is also a reason for caution, especially when making comparisons between racism and speciesism and their objects. In his article ‘The Postcolonial Animal’, Philip Armstrong proposes discursive collaboration as a response to such problems. Because ‘equations between the treatment of animals and humans fail to advance either postcolonial or animal studies very far’, he considers that ‘an alliance between the two fields must build upon other kinds of affinity’, and suggests that a ‘common antagonist’ for both discourses is ‘the continued supremacy of that notion of the human that centres on a rational individual self or ego’.⁶ In this thesis, I examine the relevance of this idea within recent fiction by the descendants of European settlers, and suggest that representations of animals are related to a serious interrogation of humanist discourse.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. set out three basic types of comparison as constituting postcolonial discourse: ‘comparisons between countries of the white diaspora – the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – comparisons between areas of the Black diaspora, and, thirdly, those which bridge these groupings’.⁷ This thesis belongs in the first

³ For instance, respectively, in the work of Erica Fudge, Garry Marvin, Chris Wilbert, Carol Adams, Steve Baker and Nigel Rothfels.

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 214.

⁵ Etienne Balibar, ed., ‘Racism and Nationalism,’ in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 56, 57 (Balibar’s emphases)

⁶ Philip Armstrong, ‘The Postcolonial Animal,’ *Society and Animals* 10, 4 (2002): 413-19, <http://psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/armstrong.shtml>

⁷ Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 18.

category. It centres on five key contemporary novels, covering a period ranging from 1999 to 2007: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999); Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001); Fiona Farrell's *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* (2007); Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* (1999) and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003).⁸ These novels originate from South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and again Canada respectively. I have chosen this cultural focus not because human-animal relations are any more significant or popular within the literature of these societies than elsewhere (although Atwood has argued that this is true of Canada⁹), but in order to examine how the cultural specificities of white postcolonial societies inform an engagement with species issues when it does occur. I employ the expression 'white postcolonial' to designate this focus; despite its unhelpful and sometimes inaccurate emphasis on colour, I have not found an unproblematic alternative. Terms involving the word 'settler' fail to acknowledge 'first peoples' own histories of settlement. Others like 'English-' or 'French-Canadian' make some sense linguistically, but are no more culturally accurate than 'European'.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the Spanish derived 'Creole', which Elleke Boehmer applies broadly to any people of European descent born in a non-European country,¹¹ is not normally used in relation to the countries with which I am concerned. Therefore, I reluctantly retain 'white postcolonial' not as the most accurate but as the clearest of the possibilities. Within this subset of postcolonialism, I am also limiting myself to those societies whose ties to Europe were primarily to Britain. There is of course no singular 'white postcolonial culture' or 'British

⁸ J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Random House, 1999); Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (2001; repr., Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2003); Fiona Farrell, *Mr Allbones' Ferret* (Auckland: Vintage, 2007); Julia Leigh, *The Hunter* (1999; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 2000); Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).

⁹ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972).

¹⁰ The increasing irrelevance of the term European in postcolonial contexts is illustrated by a 2006 campaign to change the New Zealand census forms to include 'New Zealander' as an ethnicity option. The only category available to those of white settler ancestry is 'New Zealand European', resulting in widespread use of the category 'other' by those belonging to the dominant culture. Where asked to specify, some leave the form blank, others write 'New Zealander', or, more intriguingly in the context of this thesis, 'Kiwi'. A trial of the Maori term Pakeha also met with resistance because some believe it is derogatory in origin (although historian Michael King finds no early evidence for this. See Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 168-69. It is likely that the forms for 2011 will retain 'New Zealand European' as the best means of documenting ethnicity, and so will probably meet with further resistance. Kelly Burns, 'Still no tick-box for "New Zealander,"' *The Dominion Post* April 28, 2009. <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/2367738/Still-no-tick-box-for-New-Zealander>.

¹¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

colonial culture'; whatever they may have in common, white South African, Canadian, New Zealand and Australian cultures are certainly not identical or seamlessly overlapping. However, the concentration on Britain's former colonies helps to narrow the scope of my inquiry, and makes for more similarity of cultural inheritance. I have not attempted to address fiction from the United States. This is partly because, as Boehmer writes in her own exclusion of it, 'The United States ... won independence long before other colonial places, and its literature has therefore followed a very different trajectory'.¹² Additionally, as Fredric Jameson explains, the United States is uniquely powerful within the context of globalisation,¹³ which places it in a very different position from the other postcolonial societies with which this thesis is concerned. As a final delimitation, I concentrate on relatively recent literature, the earliest of the key novels being Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Leigh's *The Hunter*, both published in 1999. The advantage of this is that it allows me to examine how the contemporary awareness of species relations is manifesting itself within white postcolonial literature.

In the remainder of this introduction, I want to give some philosophical and cultural background to the species and postcolonial themes and the relationships between them that are central to this thesis. First, I offer a brief history of the role of animals and analogies between humans and animals within humanist and imperialist constructions of humanity, together with some literary responses to the key ideas. I then make some suggestions about what culturally specific reasons white postcolonial writers might have for wanting to engage with that history. Finally, I introduce the discourses of anti-humanism and posthumanism which, as I argue over the following chapters, can be seen in various ways to inform the representation of human-animal relations within the selected novels.

¹² Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 4.

¹³ Fredric Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,' in *The Cultures of Globalization: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 59.

Animals in humanism and imperialism

Humanism has had various different meanings at different times and in different contexts. My use of it here accords with the definition offered by Kate Soper:

Humanism: appeals (positively) to the notion of a core humanity or common essential features in terms of which human beings can be defined and understood, thus (negatively) to concepts ('alienation', 'inauthenticity', 'reification', etc.) designating, and intended to explain, the perversion or 'loss' of this common being. Humanism takes history to be a product of human thought and action, and thus claims that the categories of 'consciousness', 'agency', 'choice', 'responsibility', 'moral value', etc. are indispensable to its understanding.¹⁴

I am most concerned here with humanism's privileging and marginalisation of certain concepts. Val Plumwood writes that among the key dualisms for western thought: 'In particular the dualisms of male/female, mental/manual (mind/body), civilized/primitive, human/nature correspond directly to and naturalise gender, class, race and nature respectively, although a number of others are indirectly involved'.¹⁵ In exploring the history of postcolonial treatments of animals, the most important of these points are the distinctions between humans and animals and European and non-European, and the relationship between those categories. I therefore want to begin by offering a handful of the most influential and explicit examples of such discourse.

At once essential to and often invisible within humanist subjectivity is the constitutive role of species difference; that is, humans' 'common essential features' are defined against other species. As Wolfe puts it:

this pervasiveness of the discourse of species ... has made the *institution* of speciesism fundamental ... to the formation of Western subjectivity ... an institution that relies on the tacit agreement that the full transcendence of the 'human' requires the sacrifice of the 'animal' and the animalistic.¹⁶

¹⁴ Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism: Problems of Modern European Thought* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), 11-12.

¹⁵ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 43.

¹⁶ Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 6.

Distinctions between humans and other species have often been made to hinge on the capacity for reason and language, which are, according to these arguments, inherent in humans but lacking in animals. This tradition can be traced back to classical thought. Aristotle concluded that ‘plants are created for the sake of animals, and animals for the sake of men... As nature therefore makes nothing either imperfect or in vain, it necessarily follows that she has made all these things for men’.¹⁷ Not dissimilarly, ‘man’ was accorded dominion or mastery over other creatures in Genesis.¹⁸ Although the description of diet that follows includes no reference to eating animals, St Augustine argued that the commandment ‘thou shalt not kill’ could not reasonably be applied to animals any more than to plants,¹⁹ and St Thomas Aquinas asserted that animals are not rational creatures but means to human ends.²⁰ In the seventeenth century, René Descartes contended that animals are little better than machines, and that language and reasoned action set humans apart from other species. He argued that the ability of even mute humans to communicate ‘proves not only that the brutes have less reason than man, but that they have none at all’.²¹ In the following century Immanuel Kant interpreted the distinction between humans and animals as having moral implications. He advocated a view of humans as ends in themselves, and suggested that humans have duties to animals only to the extent that kindness to animals fosters kindness towards other humans.²² Common to all of these examples, then, is the characterisation of humans in terms of their superiority to other species, and of other species in terms of their lack of human qualities.

However, other thinkers repeatedly questioned such assumptions. In ‘An Apology for Raymond Sebond’ (1569), Michel de Montaigne wrote that in terms of communication between species, humans seem to be the ones at a disadvantage, while animals ‘manifestly

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. William Ellis (London: Dent, 1912), extracts in *Political Theory and Animal Rights*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Paul Barry Clarke (London and Winchester: Pluto Press, 1990), 58.

¹⁸ Genesis 7:2-3; 9:1-2.

¹⁹ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T.T. Clark 1887), extracts in *Political Theory and Animal Rights*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Paul Barry Clarke (London and Winchester: Pluto Press, 1990), 59.

²⁰ Aquinas, Thomas, ‘That the Souls of Brute Animals Are Not Immortal,’ in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), vol. II, chap. 82.

²¹ René Descartes, ‘Discourse V’, 1637, in *René Descartes: A Discourse on Method*, trans. John Veitch (London: Dent, 1912), extracts in *Political Theory and Animal Rights*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Paul Barry Clarke (London and Winchester: Pluto Press, 1990), 16.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics— Duties Towards Animals and other Spirits*, 1780-1, trans. Louis Infield (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), extracts in *Political Theory and Animal Rights*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Paul Barry Clarke (London and Winchester: Pluto Press, 1990), 126-27.

have converse between themselves ... not only within one species but across different species'. He also asserted that there is 'no rational likelihood that beasts are forced to do by natural inclination the selfsame things which we do by choice and ingenuity', and that though humans have power over animals, we have much the same powers over each other in certain circumstances.²³ In the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope reasoned that human power over animals entails a responsibility towards them rather than a license to exploit them,²⁴ and Jeremy Bentham offered the well known reformulation: 'The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?'.²⁵ Yet despite these and many similar arguments, animal otherness remained significantly constitutive of the notion of humanity, and this point manifested itself within the imperialist discourses of European colonialism.

In *Barbaric Others*, Merryl Wyn Davis, Ashis Nandy and Zia Sardar see negative Western attitudes to other humans and animals as stemming from the same cause, suggesting that Europe has a long history of 'an anxiety-ridden perception about Other People, those beyond its actual touch and reach, and about the natural world'.²⁶ Both have been subject to 'exoticisation'.²⁷ The term 'exotic' refers to that which is geographically or culturally foreign from the perspective of a certain 'self'. Exoticising discourse, then, concentrates on and emphasises perceived contrasts between subject and object. Such details might be regarded in a positive or negative light, yet the centrality of notions of difference and distance to this perspective is often inimical to sympathy. This effect is frequently reinforced by the mapping of different kinds of difference onto each other. Animalisation was a particularly powerful tool for asserting the difference of other peoples. As Keith Thomas writes in his study of early modern English human-nonhuman relations, 'if the essence of humanity was defined as

²³ Michel de Montaigne, 'An Apology for Raymond Sebond,' 1569, in *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), 506, 514, 515.

²⁴ Alexander Pope, 'Of Cruelty to Animals', 1713, in *A Hundred English Essays*, ed. by Rosalind Vallance (London: Thomas Nelson, 1950), extracts in *Political Theory and Animal Rights*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Paul Barry Clarke (London and Winchester: Pluto Press, 1990), 72.

²⁵ Jeremy Bentham, 'An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,' 1789, in *A Fragment on Government and an Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. Wilfred Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell 1948), extracts in *Political Theory and Animal Rights*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Paul Barry Clarke. (London and Winchester: Pluto Press, 1990), 136.

²⁶ Merryl Wyn Davies, Ashis Nandy and Zia Sardar, *Barbaric Others: A Manifesto on Western Racism* (London and Boulder: Pluto Press, 1993), 1, 25.

²⁷ For the sake of clarity, I use the terms 'exoticisation' and later 'primitivisation' to refer to 'othering' perspectives, rather than exoticism and primitivism, which more commonly denote influences within art.

consisting in some specific quality, then it followed that any man who did not display that quality was subhuman, semi-animal'.²⁸ Thus, as Plumwood writes:

With the rise of colonial conquest and expansion and the ideology of progress as technological conquest, nature as the primitive and as the past from which certain 'advanced' human cultures have supposedly risen is also represented as the dualised underside of the concept of civilisation.²⁹

Human proximity to nature, therefore, was automatically assumed to mean primitiveness, and as Mary Louise Pratt writes, other peoples were portrayed as 'reductive, incomplete beings suffering from the inability to have become what Europeans already are, or to have made themselves into what Europeans intend them to be'.³⁰ A belief in their cultural and spiritual 'need' for the influence of Europe was used to justify imperial intervention as a 'civilising mission', when any justification was thought necessary. Very often, asserting peoples' similarities to animals served to reinforce this. Indeed, Thomas suggests that it may have been essential to the institution of slavery: 'it is hard to believe that the system would ever have been tolerated if negroes had been credited with fully human attributes. Their dehumanization was a necessary precondition of their maltreatment'. He writes, 'Some men were seen as useful beasts, to be curbed, domesticated and kept docile; others were vermin and predators, to be eliminated'.³¹ Meanwhile, Davies et al. observe that some were even presented as 'natural slaves', 'able to apprehend the reason of others and follow commands'.³² Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* provides a good example of such imperialistic attitudes in Crusoe's relation to the native people living near his island. Armstrong observes that 'rather than envisaging "savage" humans as animals, Crusoe typically refers to them as "inhuman"', but that he also regards cannibals as *worse* than wild beasts.³³ Crusoe's relationship with 'Friday'³⁴ demonstrates the 'civilising' benefit of

²⁸ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (1983; repr., London: Penguin, 1987), 41.

²⁹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 107.

³⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 152.

³¹ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 45, 47.

³² Davies et al, *Barbaric Others*, 62.

³³ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 23.

³⁴ Crusoe never asks his real name and simply labels him with the day of the week. As Crusoe admits to losing two days from his reckoning, it cannot even have been a Friday.

European influence. First, on being rescued from a cannibal feast, Friday becomes a 'natural slave': he 'laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head; this it seems was in token of swearing to be my slave for ever'. Over the course of their relationship, Crusoe rescues Friday from being a cannibal as well as from being cannibalised. He trains Friday out of his 'inhuman' and pagan ways until he is a protestant,³⁵ and finally takes him into European civilisation. Crusoe thus achieves all that Europeans claimed to attempt in their cultural colonisation of supposedly worse-than-animal savages.

The alternative construction of primitiveness was as a condition which could only be tainted by contact with Europeans. One influential example of this came from Montaigne. He argued that savages were 'barbarous only in that they have been hardly fashioned by the mind of man, still remaining close neighbours to their original state of nature', which he regarded as 'simple and pure'.³⁶ Such views tended to be applied to a select few; for instance, Native Americans were generally regarded in a more positive light than Africans, leading Chinua Achebe to suggest that there was a particular need or desire 'to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest'.³⁷ Aphra Behn's seventeenth-century representation of Surinamese and Nigerian people, in *Oroonoko*, provides a literary example of this sort of contrast. The nobility of Oroonoko, an enslaved Nigerian prince, is presented as an exception to rather than an example of the norms of his people. Moreover, it is not innate but the result of European civilising influence:

Some part of it we may attribute to the care of a Frenchman ... who ... perceiving him very ready, apt, and quick of apprehension, took a great pleasure to teach him morals, language and science... Another reason was, he lov'd ... to see all the English gentlemen that traded thither, and did not only learn their language, but that of the Spaniard also, with whom he traded afterwards for slaves.

Thus, as in *Robinson Crusoe*, enlightenment is of European origin. In *Oroonoko*, however, this is emphatically not the case for the Surinamese, who are characterised entirely differently.

³⁵ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719; repr., London: Everyman, 1966), 148, 175.

³⁶ Michel de Montaigne, 'On the Cannibals,' 1580, in *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), 232.

³⁷ Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Anchor Books / Doubleday, 1990), 3.

Though unclothed, they are presented as having an innocent freedom from desire, ‘so like our first parents before the fall’. Yet significantly, it is not God that the narrator credits with their state: ‘simple nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and vertuous mistress. Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the world, than all the inventions of man: religion wou’d here but destroy that tranquility they possess by ignorance’.³⁸ Thus, the Surinamese live in an innocent harmony with nature which European influence could only corrupt.

This idea became central to the later myth of the ‘noble savage’ which often contrasted European life with a Utopian alternative. The concept is commonly associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although, as translator Franklin Philip points out, Rousseau’s representation of the state of nature is ‘devoid of moral attributes’, his view of Europe was certainly critical. He argued that European medicine was dangerous, that its technology weakened Western humans by comparison with those in a state of nature, and that enlightenment serves only to instil fears. Additionally, his idea of this state of nature is not noticeably distinguished from what he calls ‘the animal condition’:

we can desire or fear things only if we can form some idea of them in our mind or through a simple impulse of nature. The savage... experiences passions only of the latter kind; his desires never go beyond his physical needs... and the only evils he fears are pain and hunger. I say pain and not death, for an animal will never know what it is to die, and a knowledge of death and its terrors is one of man’s first acquisitions upon leaving the animal condition.³⁹

Here, then, for a human to be in an ‘animal condition’ is seen not as deplorable but as preferable to European civilisation.

Rousseau’s Irish contemporary Jonathan Swift had offered an alternative interrogation of European corruption a few years before, in *Gulliver’s Travels*. At its culmination, this satire extends to species relations. The Houyhnhnms (whose name means ‘perfections of nature’) are horses, while the wild, brutish Yahoos, as Gulliver eventually recognises, are human, and the more Gulliver tries to distinguish between them, the more both he and the

³⁸ Aphra Behn. *Oroonoko and Other Stories* (1688; repr., London: Methuen, 1986), 29, 33, 32.

³⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 1755, trans. Franklin Philip (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), viii, 31, 34-35.

Houyhnhnms become convinced that Europeans and Yahoos are the same.⁴⁰ The Yahoos' wildness implies that humans have the potential to degenerate, although Gulliver himself strives to emulate the Houyhnhnms and to be accepted as one of them. However, although species values again are inverted here, species difference is still a significant proof of otherness, while, even if Europeans struggle to achieve them, the values of rationality and 'civilisation' remain central, and remain set against human animality.

The distinction between human and nonhuman in humanist discourse, then, significantly informed the imperialist portrayal of non-European cultures as primitive. This primitiveness was sometimes seen as negative and sometimes positive in comparison with European civilisation, but either version assumed that Europeans were more complex and therefore more advanced than cultures that appeared to live in greater proximity to nature. Such values persisted in later colonial thought. In particular, developments in evolutionary theory were interpreted to support notions of cultural hierarchy: the idea that some people were more primitive than others was now explained by the idea that they were literally closer to animals. Nevertheless, evolution also meant kinship, between cultures and between species, and this began to unsettle other assumptions.

As Pratt emphasises in her examination of travel writing, natural history and imperialism were closely related. She explains that students of Linnaeus, using his model for the systematization of nature, simultaneously recorded potential resources and imposed European order upon them:

Analyses of natural history ... do not always underscore the transformative, appropriative dimensions of its conception. One by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order.⁴¹

Indeed, as Harriet Ritvo comments, natural historians 'embodied a sweeping human claim to intellectual mastery of the natural world'. Their work also contributed to European countries' sense of political mastery over the world; as specimens arrived back in Europe, they became

⁴⁰ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726; repr., London: Everyman, 1977), 244, 205.

⁴¹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 31

part of colonial collections which often functioned as symbols of national power. For instance, Ritvo writes:

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, citizens who wished to admire symbols of triumphant individual enterprise as well as those of national prestige could visit the numerous exotic animal displays that mirrored the spread of British commercial influence throughout the globe.⁴²

Humans were also included within both classificatory and spectacular systems. Linnaeus had at first distinguished between *homo sapiens* and *homo monstrosus*, and eventually offered six categories – wild man, American, European, Asiatic, African, and monster (including dwarfs, giants and artificial monsters like eunuchs). Although this meant classifying humans alongside other species, Pratt comments, ‘One could hardly ask for a more explicit attempt to “naturalize” the myth of European superiority’.⁴³ Certainly, European society was not so disturbed by the idea as to prevent the display of non-Europeans; Eric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier demonstrate that ‘ethnographical’ spectacles of exoticised people were popular throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, and ranged in type from fairground stalls to zoos to the Crystal Palace exhibition.⁴⁴

Charles Darwin’s contribution to natural historical knowledge was often interpreted as offering further support to the European/non-European/nonhuman hierarchy. Monogenism, the view that all humans were descended from a common ancestor, had been the orthodox one, and according to this theory, Thomas writes, ‘it was common to explain the different varieties of men in the world by saying that the blacks had degenerated from their common ancestor, Adam, while the whites had stayed constant or even improved.’ However, ‘as the difference between men and animals ceased to appear an absolute one, polygenism [the concept of descent from different ancestors] became increasingly attractive’.⁴⁵ Michael Banton writes that Darwin’s achievement ‘was to subsume these two theories within a new synthesis which explained both change and continuity’.⁴⁶ His theory suggested that variations

⁴² Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 12, 206.

⁴³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 32.

⁴⁴ Eric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier, *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West*, trans. Oliver Welsh (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 38, 126.

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 135, 136.

⁴⁶ Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 81.

between humans might result from membership in *subspecies*. As a result, the concepts of the noble or ignoble savage began to give way to an uneasy sense of kinship with non-Europeans as ancestor figures. Darwin himself represents both non-European humans and other animals as inferior in his characterisation of the Fuegians as resembling ‘our’ (presumably Europeans’) ancestors:

These men were absolutely naked and bedaubed with paint, their long hair was tangled, their mouths frothed with excitement, and their expression was wild, startled, and distrustful. They possessed hardly any arts, and like wild animals lived on what they could catch; they had no government, and were merciless to every one not of their own small tribe.

Moreover, Darwin sometimes praises animals over savage humanity:

I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper, or from that old baboon, who descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs – as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions.⁴⁷

A literary echo of Darwin’s attitudes appears within Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, published ten years after *The Descent of Man*.⁴⁸ Achebe argues, Conrad ‘almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people... the farthest he would go was kinship’.⁴⁹ Travelling up the Congo, Conrad’s narrator Marlow declares that ‘Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world’. Seeing Africans on the banks, he comments, ‘The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell?’ Marlow watches them across the water as across an evolutionary gap, and, in a passage very like Darwin’s description of the Fuegians, Marlow animalises them even as he expresses a sense of connection. ‘No, they were not inhuman... They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you

⁴⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 404, 404-05.

⁴⁸ Joseph Conrad, *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether* (1889; repr., London: Dent, 1974).

⁴⁹ Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa’, 10-11

was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar’. Thus, kinship does not result in understanding, only ‘the faintest trace of a response ... a suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you – you so remote from the night of first ages – could comprehend’.⁵⁰ Thus, speciesism, in the form of animalisation, remains central to post-Darwinian imperialism, despite the growing belief that even European humans were descended from animals. However, because of the centrality of animal otherness to humanist constructions of the human, the evolutionary notion of kinship with animals was, at least to some, much more disturbing than kinship with other humans.

In terms of human-animal relationships, Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection was again *potentially* radically disruptive, and Ritvo writes, ‘Certainly, for those who were persuaded by it, [it] ... eliminated the unbridgeable gulf that divided reasoning human being from irrational brute.’⁵¹ For instance, in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin writes,

If it be maintained that certain powers, such as self-consciousness, abstraction, &c., are peculiar to man, it may well be that these are the incidental results of other highly-advanced intellectual faculties; and these again mainly the result of the continued use of a highly developed language.

He then describes language itself as a ‘half-art, half-instinct’ which ‘still bears the stamp of its gradual evolution’.⁵² However, Darwin’s work was still often interpreted as supporting the view of human superiority over other animals by presenting it as the natural result of evolutionary processes. Thus, as Armstrong writes, ‘Its potentially revolutionary undermining of beliefs about human supremacy were mostly inhibited (or ignored) due to the widespread interpretation of evolutionism as another of modernity’s narratives about progress towards an ever-more advanced human state’.⁵³ A novel that demonstrates both an acknowledgment of the disturbing implications of evolutionary theory and an enduring commitment to the values of anthropocentrism, rationalism and progress is H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896). Wells’ novel accepts the notion that humans are animals, but it is informed by anxieties about human animality and retrogression as threats to progress. It is Doctor

⁵⁰ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 97, 98, 92, 96.

⁵¹ Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, 39.

⁵² Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 105, 106.

⁵³ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 142.

Moreau's belief that human perfection is possible, and his aim is to accelerate evolution artificially to transform animals, physically, mentally, and emotionally, into humans. Prendick, the narrator, respects Moreau's aims but feels pity for the resulting 'Beast People', failed experiments who 'stumbled in the shackles of humanity'. Moreau has been unable to eliminate what he describes as "Cravings, instincts, desires that ... burst suddenly and inundate the whole being of the creature with anger, hate, or fear". Worse still, the Beast People show increasing signs of reversion. Moreau complains, "As soon as my hand is taken from them the beast begins to creep back". This process is later accelerated when the Beast People succumb to the temptation of meat (after Moreau's assistant brings rabbits to the island), and again when a puma escapes the vivisection room and kills Moreau. Prendick lives on the island for some time in constant fear of the Beast People, and on his return to England he finds himself constantly nervous about humans.

I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls, and that they would presently begin to revert ... I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale.⁵⁴

Like *Heart of Darkness*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* demonstrates an increasing acknowledgement of kinship with human and nonhuman 'others'. Marlow and Prendick respond by asserting and clinging to the ideology of rationality, but their certainties are obviously threatened.

Within the histories of humanist and imperialist discourse, then, the concept of animal otherness repeatedly serves to define and to bolster the Western European sense of self. Classical and early modern philosophers defined humans by their possession of reason and language, and animals by their apparent lack of these qualities. Within imperialism, animalisation and primitivisation were used to portray other peoples as inferior to civilised Europeans. Developments in natural history were not necessarily interpreted as unsettling the European worldview, and where they were perceived to constitute a threat, there remained a strong belief in rationalism,

⁵⁴ H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 1896, ed. Leon Stover (Jefferson: McFarland, 1996), 141, 132, 167-68, 146, 147, 204-05.

progress and the exceptionality of the human species. Thus, anthropocentrism, humanism and imperialism are more than parallels or similes for one another; their histories are interwoven narratives of self and other. It is out of these histories of European species and cultural relations that white postcolonial cultures emerge, necessarily inheriting from them but also challenging their principles.

White postcolonialism and species

While the literature addressed in the following chapters is in part participating in an increasingly international engagement with the ethics of species relations, I want, bearing in mind the history just discussed, to explore some culturally specific concerns that might also inform the white postcolonial representations of animals that are under consideration. In discussing white South African, Canadian, New Zealand and Australian cultures alongside one another in this way, I do not mean to imply that they are identical. A more helpful way of understanding the relationship between these societies is as evolving out of a diaspora, a term which is most strongly associated with the displacement of the Jewish people, but which can be applied to many cultural dispersals, including those of Africans and Europeans.⁵⁵ This history means that white postcolonial cultures are at once distinct from and related to one another: they have all developed in distinct ways, but because of their overlapping origins, they also display, to varying degrees, some common characteristics and cultural concerns. In relation to literature, Ashcroft et al. write: ‘The critical questions raised in ... settler colonies cluster around a peculiar set of problems which highlight some of the basic tensions which exist in all post-colonial literatures’. The three major issues they identify are ‘the relationship between social and literary practices in the old world and the new; the relationship between the indigenous populations in settled areas and the invading settlers; and the relationship between the imported language of the new place’.⁵⁶ Elaborating on the first two of these points, I want to outline six concerns that could be interpreted as factors – though I think not equally significant ones – in the white postcolonial attention to animals that is the focus of this

⁵⁵ See Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora,’ in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 169-70.

⁵⁶ Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Writes Back*, 133.

thesis. These include: guilt over historical colonisations of people; awareness of the historical relationship between speciesism and racism; white postcolonial identification with animals as victims; guilt about past human-animal relations; desire for local belonging; and desire for cultural independence.

One possible explanation for a specifically *white* postcolonial writing about species themes is that it constitutes a displacement of cultural guilt and an expiation of that guilt via animals. In other words, animals may, at some unacknowledged level, function as substitute objects of compensation in place of colonised people. Obviously, this could have problematic implications in terms of cultural relations, if the substitution is understood as an avoidance of historical responsibility or indeed as perpetuating the equation of first peoples with animals on some level. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as reflecting a desire to achieve, without approaching or indeed patronising the indigenous subject, a break with the perceived imperialism of settler ancestors. In any case, however, because an expiation of cultural guilt might well be a dynamic invisible to both writer and reader, it is perhaps impossible to assess the extent of its relevance as an explanation of white postcolonial representations of animals.

Another explanation that is much more commonly put forward for the attention to animals in postcolonial discourse is that there is awareness that analogies between humans and animals have been used, as I have just described, as a means of constructing one human group as inferior to another. Where this takes the form of animalisation, a common response to animalising rhetoric is, understandably, straightforward refutation: the effects of the comparison of oppressed groups to animals have been such that it can seem quite illogical for them to perpetuate such connections themselves. Comparisons of animals to human groups can also seem insulting. Peter Singer observes that recent animal rights theorists ‘reject the assumption of the priority of human interests as “speciesism”’, and that ‘By using that term, they make an analogy between our attitudes towards other species and the earlier, now discredited, attitudes of European racists towards members of other races’.⁵⁷ The aim here is to show that cruelty based on species difference is also unjust. However, such analogies risk being perceived as equations, and therefore as offensive to the humans referenced. A Jewish

⁵⁷ Peter Singer, preface to *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), xi, xi-xii.

character in Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* makes this point when he objects to Elizabeth Costello's analogy between animal exploitation and the Holocaust: 'The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say'.⁵⁸ This character's objection is that Costello appears to be suggesting that the deaths of cattle are as significant as those of persecuted Jews. This sort of interpretation of analogies and equations between humans and other species as offensive leads Wolfe to suggest:

[A]s long as this humanist and speciesist *structure* of subjectivization remains intact, and as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well.⁵⁹

This is one reason why it may be productive for postcolonial discourse to interrogate speciesist discourse. People who are descended from European colonisers and not from colonised people, however, may not have the same need to dismantle speciesism on their own behalf. This does not mean that they disregard the problem, but among the novels discussed in this thesis, only *Disgrace* is overtly concerned with race as well as with species relations, and it offers little in the way of challenge to equations between Africans and animals. The other novels in question avoid the question of such equations almost entirely, so awareness of them does not seem to be a significant explanation of the attention to animals in white postcolonial literature. Indeed, Margaret Atwood suggests in *Survival* that white Canadians may identify with animals as mirroring their own victimhood. This is the third explanation for white postcolonial treatments of species themes that I want to explore here.

Ashcroft et al. write that 'Diaspora does not simply refer to geographical dispersal but also to the vexed questions of identity, memory and home which such displacement produces'.⁶⁰ White postcolonial populations in South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia share these three concerns, although they do not always manifest themselves in the same ways. To begin with the first of the problems Ashcroft et al. list, white settler 'identity crises' have emerged in each context. These are caused partly by the experience of inhabiting

⁵⁸ J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 49.

⁵⁹ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 7-8.

⁶⁰ Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 217-18.

countries which were once the colonies of other nations, and which are still vulnerable to the influence of other cultures, especially Anglophone ones. For example, W.H. New, exploring connections between Canada and New Zealand, writes,

To a significant degree the societies see themselves in terms that derive from elsewhere. Celebrating their own roots, they simultaneously have felt ‘marginalized’ by the culturally powerful presence of their British heritage and their nearest neighbour (the United States, Australia). These neighbours and forebears, moreover – at least to anglophone Canada and pakeha New Zealand – even appear to speak the same language, framing or containing their own manner of expression.⁶¹

It is this situation that leads Atwood, in *Survival*, to attribute white Canadian identification with animals to a sense of victimisation. She writes that in general, ‘English animal stories are about “social relations,” American ones are about people killing animals; Canadian ones are about animals *being* killed, as felt emotionally from inside the fur and feathers’. She suggests that the reason for this is:

that Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life-denying experience as individuals – the culture threatens the ‘animal’ within them – and that their identification with animals is the expression of a deep-seated cultural fear.⁶²

This idea could also apply in other postcolonial contexts, provided, of course, the focus is on animals as victims. However, in Atwood’s own *Oryx and Crake* as well as the other texts, animals seem to be important as much more than this, and human-animal relations are often questioned more directly.

In this respect especially, perhaps, the concern with species relations addressed here reflects wider trends, including environmentalist and animal rights discourses and the growth of animal studies as an academic field. However, these concepts are also pertinent in relation to what Ashcroft et al. call the question of ‘memory’, in the sense that settlement included the colonisation of animals and the environment. Examining the impact of Europeans in New Zealand, historian Michael King asks,

⁶¹ W.H. New, *Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), ix.

⁶² Atwood, *Survival*, 74, 79.

Are human beings to be viewed as *part* of nature, and therefore as a legitimate element of any ecosystem to which they choose to attach themselves? Or are they, because of their inherent selfishness, hubristic sense of superiority and unrivalled capacity for manipulation, an inevitably alien and malevolent ingredient in ecosystems that have evolved in their absence? Or is it simply that humankind has failed thus far to exercise its intelligence and technologies to ensure that natural resources are used sustainably and other species are not sacrificed unnecessarily to human greed? ⁶³

To answer the first of these questions in the affirmative is obviously to evade either of the others, but all three questions persist, and in *Survival*, Atwood mentions guilt as a possible reason for Canadian literary attention to animals: ‘Canada after all was founded on the fur trade, and an animal cannot painlessly be separated from its skin.’ Making her own analogy between human and animal exploitations and persecutions, Atwood writes, ‘From the animal point of view Canadians are as bad as the slave trade or the Inquisition; which casts a new light on those beavers on the nickels and caribou on the quarters’. ⁶⁴ Although Atwood rejects this explanation in favour of her idea of the victim complex, it does seem an important one. An awareness of this colonial exploitation of animals clearly informs Tiffin’s ironic discussion of negative reactions to the bats in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, and a more widespread acknowledgement of this kind of responsibility might translate into more efforts to protect rare species and to avoid further colonisations of them.

Another possible factor in the white postcolonial interest in native animals is related to the third side effect of diaspora that Ashcroft et al. call the problem of ‘home’ or belonging. In *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard writes that during colonisation, ‘settler cultures crossed the oceans with their preconceptions intact, so the “nature” they have encountered is inevitably shaped by the histories they often sought to leave behind’. ⁶⁵ These imported perspectives meant that to newly arrived European settlers, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia constituted unfamiliar environments that often seemed resistant to their efforts. The trope of alienation from the land surfaces in each context. Coetzee writes that while the South African pastoral genre evokes a kind of ‘dream topography’, there is a rival one of ‘South

⁶³ King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 25.

⁶⁴ Atwood, *Survival*, 79.

⁶⁵ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 60.

Africa as a vast, empty, silent space... a land of rock and sun, not of soil and water... This landscape remains alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it'. His expression 'unsettled settlers',⁶⁶ used to describe this white South Africans unease, seems equally applicable to European settlers elsewhere. Northrop Frye writes that 'To feel "Canadian" was to feel part of a no-man's-land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands that very few Canadians had ever seen' and suggests that (white) 'Canadian sensibility ... is less perplexed by the question "Who am I?" than by some such riddle as "Where is here?"'.⁶⁷ In his introduction to the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, the poet Allen Curnow writes, 'The best of our verse is marked or moulded everywhere by peculiar pressures – pressures arising from the isolation of the country, its physical character, and its history'. Without using the term, he emphasises that this results from diaspora: 'The nineteenth-century colonists achieved their migration bodily, but not in spirit... The shock of so distant a migration, and the recoil of imagination from realities, were to be transmitted through two, three, even four NZ generations'.⁶⁸ The Australian environment, according to writer Thomas Keneally, exudes an 'unwillingness to come to terms with what Europeans expect the earth to be.' 'The hardwoods were so hard that they split axes. The seasons were inverted. European seed, planted in the earth, withered... Even the animals seemed to assert this otherness. They were absurd and from before the Ark'.⁶⁹ Thus, as Ashcroft et al. write, 'White European settlers ... faced the problem of establishing their "indigeneity" and distinguishing it from their continuing sense of their European heritage'.⁷⁰ Here, then, indigeneity is understood as a concept of belonging which native or first peoples are automatically assumed to possess, but not (usually⁷¹) as something that settlers could achieve by trying to integrate themselves into those cultures. What is significant about this negotiation for my purposes is that one means

⁶⁶ J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 7, 4.

⁶⁷ Northrop Frye, 'Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada*,' in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971), 220.

⁶⁸ Allen Curnow, ed., introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), 17, 20.

⁶⁹ Thomas Keneally, 'Here Nature Is Reversed,' in *Australia: Beyond the Dreamtime*, ed. Thomas Keneally, Patsy Adam-Smith and Robyn Davidson (London: BBC Books, 1987), 11, 22.

⁷⁰ Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 34.

⁷¹ Atwood does discuss a phenomenon in which some white Canadians did desire to 'go native' and take on Native Canadian culture and history as their own. Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

by which white postcolonial people try to construct a sense of belonging is via the nonhuman environment. Boehmer explains that in the negotiation of displacement, ‘The first and most obvious strategy was to ground ill-fitting cultural equipment in the ‘new’ geography by incorporating indigenous referents, local plant and animal imagery, and details of local habits and customs’.⁷² However, this does not fully account for the attention to animals in white postcolonial literature, because that attention is not limited to native animals.

The last point that I want to raise as a possible explanation for literature about native and non-native species is the white postcolonial desire to break away from external forms of authority. In *Post-colonial Transformation*, Bill Ashcroft underscores that colonised people are not passive victims and resist via various ‘strategies in the transformation of colonial power’.⁷³ Arguably, the same is true of white postcolonial cultures, as they seek to maintain and assert their distinctiveness and independence from international influences. Here, animals are valuable for their disruptive potential, both conceptually and because real animals, deliberately or accidentally, resist manipulation too. In *The Postmodern Animal*, Steve Baker suggests that animals feature within contemporary art as part of a postmodern desire for distance from what he calls ‘expert thinking’. He writes that the postmodern valuation of ‘the unknown over the known, the difficult over the easy, the inventive over the rulebound, and creative living over compliance’ invites engagement with nonhuman animals, in various ways, as a means of unsettling human experience and certainty.⁷⁴ Marian Scholtmeijer suggests that animals can have a similar effect in the context of fiction. She writes that although ‘culture knows animals best in their role as victims’, the animal victim in modern fiction ‘refuses to be assimilated’. She finds that

In response, fiction elevates the issue of acts of aggression against animals to the level of a genuine problem. The power of the animal victim to splinter human certainties reveals the extent to which animals even in this role defy human authority.⁷⁵

Within postcolonial fiction too, animals can be represented as contributing to or as allies in a challenge to perceived colonising or globalising threats. This can also encourage attention to

⁷² Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 207.

⁷³ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation*, 207.

⁷⁴ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 41, 48-49.

⁷⁵ Marian Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1993, 92.

real animals as the agents of practical resistance (whether or not they seem to be acting deliberately). Armstrong observes in ‘The Postcolonial Animal’ that although ‘several of the most potent and durable intellectual paradigms produced by European cultures at the height of their imperialist arrogance owe simultaneous debts to the colonial and animal worlds’ (for instance, evolutionary theory), animals have in other ways ‘tended to disrupt the smooth unfolding of Enlightenment ideology’, resisting ‘the imperialist desire to represent the natural (and especially the colonial terrain) as a passive object or blank slate ready for mapping by Western experts’.⁷⁶ In *What Animals Mean*, he elaborates on this point, using the term ‘ferity’ – in relation to humans as well as other species – ‘to indicate those forms of wilderness that represent a reaction against modernity’s attempts at civilization, domestication, captivity or manipulation’.⁷⁷ Such ideas have a ready application to white postcolonial cultural concerns with independence. Ferity as a reaction against control might have a positive connotation for white postcolonial cultures as evidence of distance from imperialism. Particularly given the historical relationship between imperialism and anthropocentrism, it is perhaps unsurprising that animals’ own powers of resistance should be regarded as admirable or even allied with this project, as they are in each of the novels to be addressed here.

The white postcolonial attention to animals that interests me in this thesis, then, can in part be attributed to certain overlapping concerns within white South African, Canadian, New Zealand and Australian cultures. In their resistance to both imperialism and anthropocentrism, all of these concerns can be seen as challenging the humanist assumptions that underlie both of those discourses. I therefore conclude this introduction by outlining concepts of anti-humanism and post-humanism and showing how they can be applied to postcolonial concerns and particularly those of the white postcolonial cultures that are my focus.

Anti-humanism and posthumanism

Kate Soper explains that within French philosophical usage, anti-humanism ‘constitutes itself a new enlightenment from whose purview every form of humanist thinking is revealed as a

⁷⁶ Armstrong, ‘The Postcolonial Animal’, <http://psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/armstrong.shtml>

⁷⁷ Armstrong. *What Animals Mean*, 227n9.

superstition which the “humanist” movement has traditionally congratulated itself upon rejecting’. She writes,

while traditionally ‘humanism’ is employed approvingly to designate an anthropocentric and secular approach to the study and evaluation of humanity, such anthropocentrism has now itself come under attack ... on the grounds that it mythologizes the object – humankind – of which it aspires to provide a rational or scientific understanding.

Soper summarises anti-humanism as follows:

Anti-humanism: claims that humanism ... is pre-scientific ‘philosophical anthropology’. All humanism is ‘ideological’; the ideological status of humanism is to be explained in terms of the systems of thought or ‘consciousness’ produced in response to particular historical periods. Anthropology, if it is possible at all, is possible only on condition that it rejects the concept of the human subject; ‘men’ do not make history, nor find their ‘truth’ or ‘purpose’ in it; history is a process without a subject.⁷⁸

Thus, anti-humanism rejects the theoretical assumptions on which humanism is based, and can therefore open space for alternative approaches to both cultural and species relations. To show how anti-humanism might function in relation to postcolonial concerns, and what problems this might raise, I want to explore the examples of Louis Althusser’s *For Marx* (1965) and Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1966).

Althusser’s work demonstrates that there need not be an absolute break between humanism and anti-humanism. Distinguishing between science (theory) and ideology, he suggests that Karl Marx’s work be regarded as adopting a concept of ‘theoretical anti-humanism’. On the one hand, ‘By rejecting the essence of man as his theoretical basis, Marx ... drove the philosophical categories of the *subject*, of *empiricism*, of the *ideal essence*, etc., from all the domains in which they had been supreme’. Yet on the other hand, Althusser argues, ‘it is possible to define humanism’s status, and reject its *theoretical* pretensions while recognising its practical function as an ideology’.⁷⁹ To apply the concept of theoretical anti-

⁷⁸ Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*, 11, 12.

⁷⁹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1969), 229.

humanism within postcolonialism obviously changes its context, and indeed, Tony Davies warns:

the tidy distinction [Althusser] draws between the clinical procedures of Marxist ‘science’ (‘theoretical practice’) and the fumbling misconceptions of ideology ... invites misreading, and can too easily entail an insulting condescension towards all those movements for... emancipation that continue to draw their energy and define their ends from humanist ideas of liberty and self-realisation.⁸⁰

Decolonising postcolonial theory is one such movement. The retention of humanist notions of autonomous subjectivity remains valuable in this context because, as Wolfe explains, ‘while the category of the subject was *formally* empty in the liberal tradition, it remained *materially* full of asymmetries and inequalities in the social sphere’.⁸¹ Therefore, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, ‘challenges to the coherent, autonomous self or subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for these must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity’.⁸² However, decolonising cultures simultaneously seek (as indeed white postcolonial cultures do) to define themselves against and undermine the influence of other theories that are associated with imperialistic or globalising forms of power, such as the belief in the superiority of European culture and civilisation. Thus, however Althusser’s own attitude is perceived, theoretical anti-humanism can still be a useful concept for postcolonial discourse in that it shows how one might challenge or reject theories that are perceived as dominating or oppressive while retaining the ideological value of human selfhood or subjectivity.

An alternative anti-humanism is offered by Althusser’s student Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*. He begins by suggesting that between the fundamental ‘codes’ of culture which establish empirical orders for people, and the theories or interpretations explaining those orders, is a third ‘region’. Here, ‘deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes ... [a culture] ... frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are not

⁸⁰ Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 59.

⁸¹ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 8.

⁸² Linda Hutcheon, *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 70-71.

the only possible ones or the best ones'.⁸³ Throughout, Foucault emphasises the constructed nature of knowledge and the instability of any one set of truths. He concludes that 'man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge'. 'As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end'.⁸⁴ Thus, Foucault goes further than Althusser not only because he seems ready to dispense with the subject altogether, but also because he *expects* the centrality of 'man' to give way to alternative forms of knowledge. What is perhaps most relevant for postcolonial concerns within his ideas is the suggestion that a culture may come to recognise alternatives to the dominant 'empirical orders' that it has taken for essential truths, and that Western culture is capable of doing so. This could mean that it comes to acknowledge the value of cultures it has previously marginalised, even if those cultures cannot themselves afford to dispense with the concept of the subject (until, perhaps such a revaluation occurs). Meanwhile, white postcolonial cultures may be better able to afford to dispense with the subject, and in their development away from the influence of their European heritage, might themselves be seen as cultures deviating from what Foucault calls empirical orders prescribed by primary codes. In these ways, Foucault's anti-humanism opens space for more fundamental reconsiderations of the human in postcolonial contexts.

In terms of postcolonial approaches to species relations, then, an engagement with anti-humanism might mean one of two things. If the practical retention of humanist ideology is interpreted to necessitate the ongoing superiority of the human within a theoretical anti-humanism, then the notion of animals as subordinate might go unchallenged. As Wolfe puts it, identity politics here risks making 'its own "sacrifice," to use the characterization of both Derrida and Bataille – of the question of the animal'.⁸⁵ Alternatively, an engagement with anti-humanism could undermine the notion of human superiority to other animals, if the decentring of 'man' is regarded as desirable and if it is understood in species terms, as challenging anthropocentrism. Among the novels to be addressed here, the former 'theoretical anti-humanist' possibility, in which animals are 'sacrificed' to humanist notions of the human,

⁸³ Michel Foucault, preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), xx.

⁸⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 386, 387.

⁸⁵ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 9.

is exemplified in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, which I examine in chapter two. The other novels adopt the second position, and they can also be seen to move in the direction of what I am calling 'species posthumanism'.

According to N. Katherine Hayles' description, posthumanism signals ... the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice.⁸⁶

The term is sometimes understood as 'post-*human*-ism' and sometimes 'beyond *humanism*', meanings that are certainly not mutually exclusive. Put simply, the difference between anti-humanism and posthumanism is that while anti-humanism seeks to undermine the supremacy of the humanist subject, posthumanism presents this supremacy as already contradicted, specifically by relativising the human alongside the nonhuman. Jonathan Burt describes posthumanism as most optimistic where it offers 'the possibility of transcending categories like essentialism, the subject/object boundary, a human-centred world, history, speciesism, and possibly death itself'.⁸⁷ Neil Badmington suggests that 'posthumanism inherits something of its 'post-' from poststructuralism', and this point is exemplified in relation to Jacques Derrida's argument that humanism cannot simply leap outside itself, and that instead, systems deconstruct from within. Badmington writes, 'An approach informed by poststructuralism testifies to an endless opposition from within the traditional account of what it means to be human'.⁸⁸ One example of such internal contradiction can be found in humanism's paradoxical reliance on distinctions from the conceptual otherness of 'the nonhuman' to define the essence and boundaries of the human. By emphasising interrelationships instead, posthumanist discourse re-envisages humans as inextricably bound up with the nonhuman, rather than isolated from or elevated above it.

⁸⁶ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 286.

⁸⁷ Jonathan Burt, 'Invisible Histories: Primate Bodies and the Rise of Posthumanism in the Twentieth Century,' in *Animal Encounters*, ed. Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 160.

⁸⁸ Neil Badmington, *Posthumanism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 9; see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1967, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London, 1976).

However, different interpretations of posthumanism emphasise different facets of this rather amorphous category of the nonhuman. Although Donna Haraway has since distanced herself from posthumanism,⁸⁹ her 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' provides a useful starting point for examining these emphases. Her argument is that 'By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs'. She writes that 'in United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached... nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal'. She also questions the distinction between 'animal-human (organism) and machine': 'Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines'.⁹⁰ The 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' therefore demonstrates how the boundaries blur both between human and animal and human and machine. Much of what has been written about posthumanism, however, has concentrated on one or the other, and until recently, the focus has often been on the latter.

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles argues that 'grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information, the posthuman offers resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines'. She expresses some wariness about technophilia, describing 'the grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self' as 'lethal'. She writes,

When [Hans] Moravec imagines 'you' choosing to download yourself into a computer, thereby obtaining through technological mastery the ultimate privilege of immortality, he is not abandoning the autonomous liberal subject but is expanding its prerogatives into the realm of the posthuman.⁹¹

Similarly, Burt observes that 'despite its effort to avoid "masterdiscourses", one cannot help but sense a counter tendency that might tempt other kinds of enslavement'. He warns, 'we have to take seriously the possibility that posthuman propositions about transcending

⁸⁹ She writes, 'I am not posthumanist; I am who I become with companion species'. Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 19.

⁹⁰ Donna J. Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,' in *The Haraway Reader*, (New York and London: Routledge 2003), 8,10, 11.

⁹¹ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 287, 286-87, 287.

difference will realise themselves in just that: the posthuman as *übermensch*'.⁹² Although Hayles emphasises that this is not an inevitable result of technological posthumanism, such risks arguably diminish within the alternative connection explored in Haraway's cyborg – that between humans and other animals – because animals are not human artefacts, or at least, not inherently and never exclusively in the way that machines are.

Wolfe suggests that 'the question of the animal is embedded within the larger context of posthumanist theory generally' but that 'the animal possesses a specificity as the object of both discursive and institutional practices, one that gives it particular power and durability'.⁹³ Certainly, because the concept of the animal has been so significant within humanism, animals constitute a potentially powerful example of that exterior otherness which Derrida sees as essential to philosophical change. Even though it remains impossible to step outside the human perspective, animals can facilitate a step outside of humanism. Indeed, in 'The Animal That Therefore I Am', Derrida suggests that the 'industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal and genetic violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries' does evoke a potentially disruptive compassion:

In response to the irresistible but unacknowledged unleashing and the organized disavowal of this torture, voices are raised ... in order to awaken us to ... this fundamental compassion that, were we to take it seriously, would have to change even the very basis ... of the philosophical problem of the animal.⁹⁴

This compassion, then, is one example of how animals can cause a move away from humanism. Otherness or difference does not disappear, but its implications change: as with machines, posthumanism regards the boundary between humans and animals as blurry, and does not see difference as constituting human isolation or justifying supremacy. Additionally, as Derrida also emphasises, difference is not between the human and the animal but between humans and a multitude of other species.⁹⁵ For posthumanism, this relativises the human

⁹² Burt, 'Invisible Histories', 160, 161.

⁹³ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 6.

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* 28, 2 (2002): 395.

⁹⁵ 'Whenever "one" says, "the Animal" ... in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be man ... he utters an asinanity.' Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am', 399-400.

species, positioning it not within a single division or a hierarchy but within a network of interrelationships.⁹⁶

New asks whether power in a marginalized society comes from ‘borrowing, emulating and so appearing to join the power structure of the dominant society... Or from fidelity to the things that matter locally and personally’.⁹⁷ Both are possibilities, and they are not incompatible. Within postcolonial discourse, as I observed in relation to anti-humanism, there are different possible approaches to the notion of subjectivity. Both decolonising and white postcolonial cultures might seek self-affirmation in the wake of alienation. However, white postcolonial groups are in an ambiguous position, with their sense of this alienation set against their colonial inheritance. In this case, cultural assertion can also take the form of a more postmodern self-reflexivity. In *Splitting Images*, for instance, Hutcheon writes ‘irony, with its potential political application, is an important element in Canadian literature (and art), because it is a way of ‘saying two things at once’.⁹⁸ An engagement with posthumanism on the part of white postcolonial cultures can be read as another instance of willingness to interrogate their own subjectivity, with or without irony, in relation to the nonhuman. In this thesis, I use the term ‘species posthumanism’ to refer to interrogations of humanism that work by relativising the human in relation to other animals. The possible reasons for white postcolonial attention to species that I put forward earlier can all, potentially, take this form. I want to emphasise, however, that I do not necessarily see the novels addressed in the following chapters as *embodying* this. Rather, I want to suggest that the exploration of their engagements with humanist ideas often reveals implicit or explicit experimentation with this concept and, to varying degrees, many of the novels *move in the direction* of a postcolonial species posthumanism.

The chapters which follow each centre on a different text, and are arranged thematically. The first section of the thesis is used to demonstrate the widely differing possible approaches to humanist discourse and species relations within white postcolonial literature, as exemplified

⁹⁶ There clearly is some overlap here between posthumanist and ecological perspectives. However, the priorities are not always the same; ecology is concerned with the ‘relativisation’ of the human specifically in relation to nature and the environment, whereas posthumanism is concerned primarily with the disruption of the humanist subject via interrelationships with the nonhuman in whatever form it takes. The two discourses are thus theoretically but not necessarily compatible.

⁹⁷ New, *Dreams of Speech and Violence*, x.

⁹⁸ Hutcheon, *Splitting Images*, vii.

by J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*. I begin with *Disgrace* as articulating the complex relationship between questions of postcolonial culture, species, and white postcolonial writing itself. I suggest that this novel explores the productive potential of species posthumanism in terms of negotiating both human-animal relations and post-apartheid politics, even though it does not offer any clear solution to either problem. In the second chapter, I turn to *Life of Pi*, where animals appear as a means of undermining excessive rationalism, but not the human subject, which remains coherent and the master of other species. I argue that *Life of Pi* can therefore be read as offering a version of theoretical anti-humanism.

The second section of the thesis is historically structured around novels set in the past, present and future. In a fictionalisation of a shipment of mustelids to New Zealand in the 1880s, Fiona Farrell's *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* emphasises that humans are not superior animals or exempt from the laws of nature. Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* is also concerned with colonial human-animal relations, in this case with the extinction of the thylacine or Tasmanian tiger, but here that history is not retold but replayed in a contemporary context where, I suggest, species and technological posthumanisms are set against one another. Finally, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* pushes similar concerns into the future, presenting a scenario in which both technological and species posthumanisms exploit nonhuman animals and exacerbate the supremacy of the human in a post-natural and post-postcolonial world, yet still fail to eliminate the power of nature.

The historical theme of this section permits the examination of representations of human-animal relations through a temporal lens, showing how each novel uses ideas about the past or future to comment on contemporary attitudes. All three novels convey awareness, arguably informed by sensitivity about colonial history, that the past involves events and attitudes which it is important to avoid repeating. They connect this to concerns about species by emphasising the relationship between imperialism and the exploitation of animals. Addressing these three novels chronologically (in terms of their settings) I suggest that they share fears of that relationship having increasingly detrimental results. In these ways, my second section builds on the contrasting connections between species and cultural issues explored in the first, by drawing out the temporal dimension to the alliance against humanism.

This thesis, then, is an attempt, firstly, to show how contemporary white postcolonial writers are engaging with the theme of human-animal relations, and what patterns appear within the resulting literature that might point to reasons for this. My argument is that to a significant degree, the sort of alliance that Philip Armstrong recommends in the context of postcolonial and animal studies discourse, in response to the ‘common antagonist’ of humanism, is being made within white postcolonial literature, and I attempt to show how this occurs. Whether through theoretical anti-humanism, a decentring of ‘man’ as the master of nature, or the repositioning of humans in relation to other animals that I call species posthumanism, all five of the novels addressed here can be seen to engage with animals as part of an opposition to some aspect of humanist discourse. Within this dynamic, animals are represented as being more than the victims of anthropocentric humanism: they have power to resist it by unknowingly influencing the attitudes of individual human characters and disrupting humanist endeavours by their own actions. Thus, animals are in each novel seen as participating in a challenge to humanism.

SECTION ONE

1. Like a Dog: Animals and humility in *Disgrace*

J.M. Coetzee: cultural and species relations in literature

The work of South African writer J. M. Coetzee provides a useful starting point for exploring white postcolonial anti-humanist and posthumanist approaches to animals. His novels often address postcolonial issues, literature itself, and the relationship between humans and other species. He frequently takes on controversial aspects of these themes, negotiating them through the use of careful characterisation. His novels tend to follow one protagonist very closely, either employing a first person viewpoint, or his own brand of the third person limited; in the latter case, the narrative follows the actions and thoughts of the protagonist with more immediacy than third person, but less than first person. For this reason, I refer to it as ‘third person intimate.’ Those of his novels to use this technique are narrated, if not always through the protagonist’s eyes, then primarily according to his or her views. As a result, authorial distance from the protagonist is sometimes obscured. Alternative viewpoints are instead indicated by other characters who interact with the protagonists, so that the novels can become a stage for debates. In *The Master of Petersburg*, for instance, the fictionalised Dostoyevsky (the protagonist) argues extensively with the anarchist Sergei Nechayev about pre-revolutionary Russia.¹ Of course, the medium of fiction allows Coetzee to engage with such debates without offering any explicit opinion of his own. Peter Singer observes this technique at work in *The Lives of Animals*, in which Coetzee’s protagonist Elizabeth Costello gives two lectures about animals. Singer writes of the lectures, ‘They are *Costello*’s arguments. Coetzee’s fictional device enables him to distance himself from them ... without ... committing himself to these claims’.² This technique enables him to explore multiple sides of politically charged issues, including the themes of postcolonialism, literature and species which are of interest here.

Many of Coetzee’s novels explore problematic race relations, past and present, and often from the point of view of white colonisers or their postcolonial descendents. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for instance, centres on the experiences of an unnamed colonial magistrate. He is

¹ J.M. Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994).

² Peter Singer, Reflections on *The Lives of Animals*, by J.M. Coetzee, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 91.

at first deliberately blind to the sufferings of the ‘barbarians,’ but, in part because one of them becomes his mistress, he becomes unable to countenance the injustices perpetrated in the name of ‘the Empire,’ and eventually rebels. The novel’s undefined physical setting highlights the relevance of the text to multiple instances of colonialism.³ In *Foe*, Coetzee offers a retelling of *Robinson Crusoe* through the eyes of a character named Susan Barton. One striking feature of the novel is Coetzee’s decision to make the colonised Friday mute; Cruso tells Susan that Friday’s previous captors cut out his tongue, but the possibility remains that Cruso did it.⁴ Friday’s speechlessness foregrounds his subordinated position, as his physical inability to tell his own story literalises his mediation by Crusoe in Defoe’s novel. Some critics consider that by silencing characters like Friday, Coetzee defeats his purpose and perpetuates colonialism. Benita Parry argues that despite Coetzee’s apparent intention, Friday’s silence nevertheless repeats the occlusion of the voice of the colonised, and locates *Foe* among the same voices of Europe which Coetzee means to subvert. She makes similar comments about Michael K in *Life & Times of Michael K*,⁵ and the magistrate’s barbarian mistress (who is reluctant to narrate her story) and her people in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It is difficult to see, however, how Coetzee could unproblematically ‘speak for’ the colonised, and indeed Parry also criticises the use of ‘ventriloquism’ in *Age of Iron*.⁶ By using silence, then, Coetzee is able to illustrate oppression without such presumption.

Indeed, Coetzee’s own position is sometimes so ambiguous that Marjorie Garber questions whether the *The Lives of Animals* might really be meant as a question about analogy: ‘In these two elegant lectures we thought John Coetzee was talking about animals. Could it be, however, that all along he was really asking, “What is the value of literature?”’.⁷ It is true that a significant feature of Coetzee’s work is his interest in the politics and processes involved in writing. Such ideas appear in his own non-fictional work, *White Writing*,⁸ while several of his novels include elements of meta-literature. In *Foe*, Susan Barton, once cast

³ J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980).

⁴ J.M. Coetzee, *Foe* (New York: Viking Press, 1986).

⁵ J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983).

⁶ Benita Parry, ‘Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee,’ *New Formations* 21 (1993): 3-4. J.M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (New York: Random House, 1990).

⁷ Marjorie Garber, *Reflections on The Lives of Animals*, by J.M. Coetzee, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 84.

⁸ J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

away with Cruso and Friday, struggles to retain control of her story as she tells it to the writer, Foe, back in England. In *The Master of Petersburg*, Dostoyevsky tries to come to terms with the (fictional) death of his stepson, Pavel Alexandrovich, an event which eventually comes to feed his own writing.⁹

Of course, the fact that Coetzee's novels often contain meta-literary material of this kind does not mean that their other content is only a vehicle for this. There can be no question that in *The Lives of Animals*, animals *are* a focus, whatever other ideas they may convey, and it is of course this theme which ties Coetzee's work to the concept of species posthumanism addressed here. In *The Lives of Animals*, the question of species is, as Garber puts it, 'clearly staged as a debate between poetry and philosophy'.¹⁰ Costello, a novelist, considers that reason reduces animals to their least interesting characteristics, arguing for instance that Wolfgang Köhler's reason tests, in which a chimpanzee had to use crates to reach food, reduced the chimpanzee 'From the purity of speculation (Why do men behave like this?) ... toward lower, practical, instrumental reason (How does one use this to get to that?)'. Her recommended approach to animals is to 'open your heart and listen to what your heart says'.¹¹ An interest in animals is also present in the background of several of Coetzee's other novels. They are frequently shown to be caught up in and indeed inseparable from the human world, and sometimes from the human. For instance, in *The Master of Petersburg*, Dostoyevsky is woken by the cries of a dog and is unable to ignore them, so goes out to free her paw from her chain. He imagines that the dog is a possible 'thief in the night,' a reference to the return of Christ which he uses to express his longing for his dead stepson. 'He ... must get dressed and answer the call. If he expects his son to come as a thief in the night, and listens only for the call of the thief, he will never see him'.¹² Details of this kind bring animal concerns into Coetzee's work even where they are not a focal point.

Thus, Coetzee's fiction as a whole covers much of the territory to be explored in this thesis, addressing the themes of animals, postcolonialism and white postcolonial literature, and exploring their interrelationships. Of Coetzee's novels, the one which most clearly combines postcolonial, literary and species concerns is *Disgrace*. These concerns are related

⁹ This is also self-referential in that it connects to the death of Coetzee's own son, similarly through a fall.

¹⁰ Garber, *Reflections*, 79.

¹¹ Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 29, 37.

¹² Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, 80.

in the novel in that both cultural and species relations are shown to require an adjustment of mindset, away from humanism. While the novel does not actually offer solutions in either case, I suggest that it does begin to explore what I am calling species posthumanism alongside and in conjunction with post-apartheid cultural relations.

Disgrace

Among the novels to be addressed here, *Disgrace* is the most concerned with race relations. Whereas in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, the white postcolonial populations are by far the largest and current changes in race relations tend to be gradual, the population of African cultures greatly outnumbers other groups in South Africa, so that the end of apartheid has meant radical cultural and political changes that are still being negotiated. Published in 1999, *Disgrace* appeared five years after the African National Congress came to power in South Africa's first post-apartheid election. The effects of this political change, particularly the abolition of apartheid, are presented on a personal level in the novel through their impact on individual characters and especially the white protagonist, David Lurie.¹³ Lurie initially seems to regard himself as privileged in terms of race, gender and species relations; thus, he can be said to subscribe to the humanist notion of the white male human subject as superior. Although Lurie is presented using the 'third person intimate' perspective mentioned above, with the narrative always following his thoughts, the novel simultaneously achieves distance from him through satire, irony, and by presenting contrasting characters. It is through these techniques that the issues of post-apartheid race relations and species relations are first raised.

Derek Attridge, in his discussion of *Disgrace*, notes that 'Much of [the] early section of the novel reads, unusually for Coetzee, as satire'.¹⁴ Attridge's example of this is Lurie's sarcastic refusal, for the sake of a principle, to cooperate with the university's inquiry into his affair with a student (47-58). This tone contributes to the creation of authorial distance from Lurie in the earlier part of the novel. During the remainder, this effect is intensified by the juxtaposition of Lurie with characters who think very differently from him, particularly his daughter, Lucy. Using the term 'focalization' over 'point of view' or 'perspective', 'because it

¹³ Lurie's ancestral origins are not defined, but he is obviously of European descent, and Anglophone.

¹⁴ Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 169.

emphasizes the fluidity of narrative', Gayatri Spivak argues that the relentless 'focalization' on Lurie provokes one to 'counterfocalize', because the reader, as reader, 'does not want to share in Lurie-the-chief-focalizer's inability to "read" Lucy'.¹⁵ Spivak's idea gains considerable support from an instance of meta-fiction in which Lucy says to her father,

You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life, I am the one who makes the decisions. (198)

This passage effectively advises the reader to pay attention to Lucy's opinions as well as Lurie's. These devices work against the narrative concentration on Lurie's individual subjectivity, and complicate the issues of culture and species, on which Lurie and Lucy frequently disagree.

In this chapter, I explore the novel's opposition between theory and practice, showing how Lurie's experiences and the use of irony and counterfocalization work against his initial assumptions, which I read as humanist, and towards what Mike Kissack and Michael Titlestad, in their discussion of the novel, describe as a 'secular humility'.¹⁶ I suggest that this kind of 'non-arrogance' assists Lurie in the negotiation of post-apartheid cultural relations, and facilitates something approaching what I am calling species posthumanism in relation to animals.

Theory

Disgrace first approaches animals through the opposite viewpoint to *The Lives of Animals*, since, unlike Elizabeth Costello, Lurie is initially indifferent to other species (143). Indeed, because of Lurie's own priorities, the importance of animals in the novel is not immediately apparent. Kissack and Titlestad suggest that an 'intellectual and rational hubris ... characterizes his life as an academic'.¹⁷ Lurie lives in Cape Town where, 'Once a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as

¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching,' *Diacritics* 32, 3-4 (2002):22.

¹⁶ Mike Kissack and Michael Titlestad, 'Humility in a Godless World: Shame, Defiance and Dignity in Coetzee's *Disgrace*,' *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 38, 3 (2003): 137.

¹⁷ Kissack and Titlestad, 'Humility in a Godless World', 137.

part of the great rationalization, adjunct professor of communications' (3). Thus, he has been an adherent and proponent of European culture, and although the university's restructuring shows him that it considers his expertise less relevant now, he does not experiment with alternatives. Instead, as his sexual relationships show, he continues to think in arguably humanist terms, using animals as conceptual tools and engaging in Eurocentric exoticisation and classicism.¹⁸

At this point, animals only feature in figurative terms for Lurie; his representations of his relationships with two women, Soraya (an escort) and Melanie Isaacs (his student), contain the only references to other species in this part of the novel. The first example occurs when Lurie reflects that, because he is not passionate, 'Intercourse between Soraya and himself must be ... rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest' (2-3). When he tries to follow Soraya and telephone her at home, he also sees her defensive response in metaphorical animal terms: 'what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen's nest, into the home of her cubs?' (10). With Melanie, Lurie gives in to passion from the first, and again sees his behaviour in terms of predation. After getting her address from the university, he intrudes and imposes himself on her:

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away. (25)

These references to animals, then, are only ideas about animals used to describe human situations. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams suggests that figurative language makes animals and women into 'absent referents' for one another. She writes that descriptions of violence towards animals reference violence towards women, and vice versa, 'without acknowledging the originating oppression ... that generates the power of the metaphor'.¹⁹ For instance, the expression 'the rape of nature' obscures the victims of literal

¹⁸ That these tendencies appear in his response to gender relations is probably not coincidental. Robert Morrell explains that gender as well as race relations underwent rapid changes in contemporary South Africa with the election of the ANC: 'Twenty-five per cent of the new parliament were women... This was in stark contrast to the male-dominated parliaments of previous years. Once in power, the ANC used its parliamentary strength to promote a vigorous gender campaign.' Robert Morrell, ed., 'The Times of Change: Men and Masculinity in South Africa,' in *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2000), 19.

¹⁹ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 4.

rape, while expressions like ‘the butchering of women’ obscure the slaughter of animals. In Lurie’s construction of his relationships, animals are mentioned by name, but they are absented in that he is not concerned with real animals at all. It is not clear why Lurie does use images of predation, but their effect is to distance him from his own actions, making it hard to gauge his view of himself. One possibility is that he might see predation as romanticising the associated behaviour, like European hunting imagery. Matt Cartmill explains that ‘As hunting came to dominate the leisure and imagination of the medieval aristocracy’, participants in many different sorts of pursuit, including romance, became ‘figurative deer, hounds or huntsmen in medieval and Renaissance literature’. Alternatively, Lurie’s chosen images might imply guilt. Cartmill writes that in some cases, ‘Deer and rabbits, the traditionally favored objects of the hunt, symbolize harmlessness, vitality, and innocent sexuality’.²⁰ It seems likely that this idea informs Melanie’s characterisation as a rabbit.

As well as obscuring real animals and distancing Lurie from his real actions, the problem with these metaphors is that if they indeed stem from the sort of literature Cartmill describes, then Lurie is perceiving through a lens that is ill-suited to the South African context. This inappropriateness is underscored by the fact that Soraya and Melanie are not only South African, they are of non-European extraction. Lurie is choosing women with whom, Attridge notes, a sexual relationship ‘would have been a prosecutable offence for most of his life’.²¹ Although his tastes might suggest a degree of relief at the passing of the old regime, his choices can also be seen as evidence of Eurocentric thinking because he is attracted by what he finds exotic. Soraya is the obvious instance of this. She is Muslim, with ‘honey-brown’ skin, ‘long black hair and dark, liquid eyes’ (1), and Lurie has presumably chosen her from her profile at the agency, which is listed under ‘Exotic’(7). By contrast, when he begins a relationship with Melanie, he notes her ‘black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes’ (11), but her non-European ancestry is obscured.²² However, Attridge finds convincing evidence to suggest that ‘the Isaacs family are, according to apartheid race classifications, “coloured”’. This includes Melanie’s boyfriend’s advice to

²⁰ Matt Cartmill, *A View to Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 69, 159.

²¹ Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 173n.

²² This comes across as Lurie’s doing; because of the ‘third person intimate’ narrative viewpoint, such an elision implies that he is trying to ignore this aspect of Melanie’s identity, to avoid acknowledging the racist dimension of his exploitation of her.

‘Stay with your own kind’ (194), Lurie’s idea of her as ‘the dark one’ (18), and, when he is reprimanded for the relationship, his colleague’s references to ‘a case with overtones like this one’ (50) and ‘the long history of exploitation of which this is part’ (53). Thus, as Attridge writes, ‘We are ... allowed to surmise that her appeal derives in part from a certain exoticism’.²³ Lurie’s desire for the exotic, of course, is potentially laden with meaning. Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues that in Orientalism, ‘the discourses of cultural and sexual difference are powerfully mapped onto each other’. She writes that ‘discourses of colonialism have ... constructed the world as natural territory ready for the conquest of the “rational” and “civilized” European man’, and suggests that the figure of the veiled Oriental female is constitutive of the figure of the Western male.²⁴ Lurie’s sexual preferences might therefore suggest a problematically selective acceptance of the changes brought about in 1994: far from regarding Soraya and Melanie as his equals now that apartheid has ended, his attraction to them may derive from an imperialistic fascination with or desire to appropriate the exoticised ‘other’.

Finally, both Eurocentrism and animal similes inform Lurie’s attempt to explain his relationship with Melanie, both to himself and to others after she makes an official complaint. Watching her rehearse a play (ironically, a modern comedy set in South Africa), Lurie muses, ‘Strange love! Yet from the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that’ (25).²⁵ Later, when a university committee asks for Lurie’s view of their relationship, he says, ‘Suffice it to say that Eros entered ... I became a servant of Eros’ (52). However, when asked if he is offering a defence of ungovernable impulse, he says that it was not ungovernable (52), so the reference is just his way of describing desire. He does not seem to recognise that this allusion undermines him by emphasising that he is out of touch with his South African context.²⁶ However, when he goes to stay with his daughter Lucy after resigning from the university, he avoids this kind of classicism, perhaps because he is now

²³ Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 173n.

²⁴ Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10, 11.

²⁵ This may be read as another instance of satire. Aphrodite is born from sea foam as the result of the castration of Uranos. Lurie’s loss of position over his relationship with Melanie, and the novel’s castration references, turn the appearance of this epithet into a subversion of Lurie and his Eurocentric thinking.

²⁶ This is more problematic coming from Lurie than it might be from someone who is not of European descent. The European genres which feature in Derek Walcott’s work, for instance, are not likely to be read as nostalgia for colonialism, because of his ‘colonised’ heritage and because he is celebrating West Indian cultural hybridity, whereas Lurie’s Europeanising looks like a preference for the foreign over the local.

removed from the academic context, or perhaps because he feels a greater sense of shame before his own daughter. '*I was the servant of Eros*: that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? *It was a god who acted through me*. What vanity! Yet not a lie, not entirely' (89). Instead, Lurie uses an analogy with a previous neighbour's dog to suggest that his actions were the result of instinct:

Whenever there was a bitch in the vicinity it would get excited and unmanageable, and with Pavlovian regularity the owners would beat it. This went on until the poor dog didn't know what to do. At the smell of a bitch it would chase around the garden with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide. (90)

Here, Lurie is no longer connecting himself with animals via metaphor. Instead, his point is that he *is* an animal and that being punished for acting on his instincts is unfair. It is not clear whether he actually believes this, or whether he thinks this excuse is more likely to appeal to Lucy (who might sympathise with the dog he describes). However, in abandoning his explanation that a god acted through him for one in which he is like a dog punished for his instincts, Lurie is taking his first step away from Eurocentrism and towards awareness of commonality with animals and of how humans treat animals.

In the initial section of the novel, then, the narrative remains close to Lurie's perspective, but his character is, as Attridge suggests, conveyed with a degree of irony. His exoticising relationships with Soraya and Melanie and his use of Greek mythology and animal metaphors to think about them suggest a failure to come to terms with the new South Africa and a tendency to approach life from a Eurocentric and anthropocentric point of view. As the novel progresses, however, Lurie is forced to face practical realities in terms of both race and species relations, and counterfocalization now comes into play too, so that the reader is continually offered counterpoints to Lurie's attitudes.

Encounters

This begins when, to escape the aftermath of his relationship with Melanie, Lurie goes to stay with Lucy on her farm. In doing so, he can be understood to be settling, in a contemporary sense: he is moving from the Eurocentric life he has been leading in Cape Town into rural Africa, where he has to negotiate an entirely new set of challenges. The representation of this transition accords with Parry's observation that Coetzee frequently offers 'subversive

rewritings of the genres traditional to colonial fiction, especially those favoured by the traditional white South African novel'.²⁷ Lurie's attitudes on his arrival recall those of the South African pastoral genre, which Coetzee describes in *White Writing* as 'essentially conservative ... it looks back, usually in a spirit of nostalgia, to the calm and stability of the farm, a still point mediate between the wilderness of lawless nature and the wilderness of the new cities'.²⁸ Seeing the kind of life that Lucy leads her on her farm, Lurie thinks of her as a 'sturdy young settler' (61), on 'A frontier farm of the new breed. In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs and daffodils. The more things change, the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein' (62). These colonial and very naïve attitudes are immediately undermined by Lurie's experiences at the farm, in terms of both cultural and species relations. Thus, *Disgrace* has the same effect that Parry finds at work in Coetzee's other generic subversions, of 'opening conventions to scrutiny and confronting the traditional and unproblematic notion of the canon'.²⁹

In her response to *The Lives of Animals*, Barbara Smuts points out that 'none of the characters ever mentions a personal encounter with an animal', and comments that 'the lack of reference to real-life relations with animals is a striking gap in the discourse on animal rights contained in Coetzee's text'.³⁰ In *Disgrace*, by contrast, the question of animals arises *through* real-life relations with them (or at least, real life in the terms of the novel's reality). Animals do retain their earlier function as representatives of human concerns, but real animals become far more significant than those which appear in metaphors. In Lucy's world, animals are certainly not absent or obscured; on the contrary, they are sometimes too close for Lurie's comfort. The dogs housed in Lucy's kennels have a separate space, but when Lurie first visits Lucy's friends Bev and Bill Shaw, he is disconcerted by the extent to which they share their home with other species. As he enters, 'he is repelled by the odours of cat urine and dog minge and Jeyes Fluid that greet them' (72). Inside, there is 'the cheeping of birds in cages, cats everywhere underfoot'. Outside, 'chickens scratch around and what looks uncommonly like a duiker snoozes in a corner' (73). Lurie is obviously unaccustomed to this degree of

²⁷ Parry, 'Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee', 2.

²⁸ Coetzee, *White Writing*, 4.

²⁹ Parry, 'Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee', 2.

³⁰ Barbara Smuts, Reflections on *The Lives of Animals*, by J.M. Coetzee, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 107, 108.

interspecies intimacy. The brief glimpse of the duiker, a native antelope, is also revealing of his detachment from his own South African context. The word ‘uncommonly’ used to convey Lurie’s impression betrays both surprise and uncertainty about his ability to identify it at all, again pointing to his Eurocentric and anthropocentric habits of mind.

After Lurie and Lucy leave the Shaws’ house, the two of them enter into an ongoing debate about human-animal relations, in which Lucy’s counterfocalizing role is very important. When Lurie expresses his sense of alienation, Lucy accuses him of elitism and anthropocentrism, and instead advocates what I would call a species posthumanist view of life as shared with other animals:

You don’t approve of friends like Bev and Bill Shaw because they are not going to lead me to a higher life... it is true. They are not going lead me to a higher life, and the reason is, there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals... I don’t want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs and pigs live under us. (74)³¹

Lurie responds with a counterargument for human exceptionality, and rejects the spiritual element of Lucy’s point. He says:

We are of a different order of creation from the animals. Not higher, necessarily, but different. So if we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we feel guilty or fear retribution. (74)

The fact that Lurie is the protagonist does not mean that the reader is necessarily expected to agree with him; on the contrary, his lecturing tone is alienating and might encourage the reader to examine Lucy’s point of view.

The same dynamic comes into play when they continue this conversation in the kennels. Lucy comments that dogs ‘are part of the furniture, part of the alarm system. They do us the honour of treating us like gods and we respond by treating them like things’ (78). Lurie replies by telling her that ‘The Church Fathers ... decided they [animals] don’t have proper souls... Their souls are tied to their bodies and die with them’ (78). He does not specify which Church Fathers, but his point echoes the ideas of Thomas Aquinas: in *Summa Contra Gentiles*,

³¹Lurie has not criticized the Shaws, but there is some justification in Lucy’s accusation, because he has been thinking: ‘Curious that he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback’ (61). This suggests that he is making a distinction between city intellectuals and farmers, and a judgement in favour of the former.

Aquinas argues that ‘brute animals’ do not have immortal souls, and claims that this argument is in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church.³² Lurie’s reasons for making this observation are ambiguous; he could just be offering an example of the attitudes that Lucy has just described. However, he seems to be offering theoretical support for them. Lucy, who is guided by practical experience and not European philosophy, questions whether humans have souls: ‘I’m not sure that I have a soul. I wouldn’t know a soul if I saw one.’ Rather than acknowledging Lucy’s implicit questions, Lurie overrides them, asserting, ‘That’s not true. You are a soul. We are all souls. We are souls before we are born’ (79). He is not agreeing with Lucy, then, but he appears to be falling back on a default position drawn from received ideas, rather than presenting arguments which he believes or has even considered before. Lucy does not reply but ‘regards him oddly’ (79), her distrust again inviting the reader to counterfocalize and to question Lurie’s position.

Perhaps because she sees practical experience as more likely to affect Lurie than arguing, Lucy suggests that Lurie could help Bev in her animal shelter in order to alleviate his boredom. Lurie is reluctant at first. He says, ‘It sounds suspiciously like community service. It sounds like someone trying to make reparation for past misdeeds’ (77). This suggests that because he thinks of animals as signifiers of human meanings, Lurie is afraid that helping them will be read as an act of contrition about Melanie, when he has already refused to accept the university’s recommendation to show remorse (66). But Lucy is more interested in how he can offer practical help. ‘As to your motives, David, I can assure you, the animals at the clinic won’t query them. They won’t ask and they won’t care’ (77). He does agree to help Bev, and she is the one who unknowingly argues with Lurie’s distinctions between humans and other animals. He implicitly rejects her suggestion that he likes animals, saying, ‘I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them’ (81). However, Bev ignores his hostility and replies, ‘Yes, we eat up a lot of animals in this country... It doesn’t seem to do us much good. I’m not sure how we will justify it to them’. Lurie is left thinking, with apparent sarcasm: ‘Justify it? When? At the Great Reckoning?’ (82). Then, when Bev is moved at seeing a goat which must be killed, Lurie tries to invoke his distinction as a source of comfort by suggesting that goats might be instinctively prepared for death, but Bev

³² Thomas Aquinas, ‘That the Souls of Brute Animals are not Immortal,’ in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis. (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 2:267-272.

responds by including animals in the first person plural: 'I don't think we are ready to die, any of us, not without being escorted' (84). Lurie concludes that Bev is 'not a veterinarian but a priestess, full of New Age mumbo jumbo' (84).³³ However, his high-minded criticisms do not foster sympathy with him, whether or not the reader agrees with Bev. Again, then, the novel encourages the reader to examine the alternative views of human-animal relations which Lucy endorses, without ever departing from its close concentration on Lurie. Lucy has a similar effect in relation to Lurie's view of race relations.

As I suggested above, Lurie's exoticisation of Soraya and Melanie aligns him with imperial attitudes, and this is also true of his view of Lucy's African neighbour, Petrus, when he first arrives at the farm, regarding him in the same outdated, colonial terms in which he first regards Lucy's life. Lucy herself introduces Petrus as 'my new assistant. In fact, since March, co-proprietor' (62). As Timothy Strode writes, Petrus and Lurie's historical positions have in fact reversed, as emphasised by 'Petrus's ascension to property-holding status – on land, moreover, formerly belonging to whites'. Strode notes, 'Petrus's ambitious upward mobility..., two wives, several children, and staunch virility stand in stark contrast to Lurie's economic decline..., two divorces, single child, and steady movement toward sexual asceticism'.³⁴ However, Lurie immediately reduces him to his most minor role, flatly stating, in place of a greeting, 'You look after the dogs' (64). Lucy seems to understand that Lurie underestimates Petrus, and she attempts the same remedy here that she does with his anthropocentrism: she suggests that he help Petrus with the tasks of 'establishing his own lands' (76). Lurie is much more receptive to this idea than to helping animals, saying, 'Give Petrus a hand. I like that. I like the historical piquancy' (77). He is obviously not threatened by the suggestion, but then, he does not understand the new power relations, for he seems to be joking when he asks, 'Will he pay me a wage for my labour, do you think?' Lucy replies quite seriously: 'Ask him to pay you. He can afford it. I'm not sure I can afford him any more' (77). Here, then, Lucy acknowledges and accepts, where Lurie does not, the full extent of the 'historical piquancy'. With race relations as with species relations, then, Lurie and

³³ The expression 'mumbo jumbo' derives from some colonists' belief that certain African tribes worshipped a deity by the name of Mumbo Jumbo, although there is little evidence to this effect. Over time, the term acquired its present meaning (OED). Lurie's use of it could be interpreted as a symbol of his failure to understand Africa, as well as demonstrating his failure to understand Bev.

³⁴ Timothy Francis Strode, *The Ethics of Exile: Colonialism in the Fictions of Charles Brockden Brown and J. M. Coetzee* (Routledge: New York and London, 2005), 222.

Lucy have very different ideas, and she tries to undermine his assumptions through practical experiences.

Indeed, the parallels between these two issues are considerable. The contrast between Lucy and Lurie's perspectives is such that, if with problematic implications, their previous discussion about animals could be read as a metaphor for race relations. Lurie could be arguing for cultural instead of species segregation: 'We are ... not higher, necessarily, but different,' while Lucy argues against it: 'this is the only life there is. Which we share' (74). Of course, this reading is a dangerous one in terms of both culture and species. As discussed in my introduction, animalisation has often been used as an othering device to legitimise oppression. In *The Lives of Animals*, Elizabeth Costello's comparison of the destruction of animals with the Holocaust (recalling those made by Derrida³⁵) offends a Jew in her audience.³⁶ The problem with this kind of analogy is that, like the metaphors discussed by Carol Adams, it can easily mean subordinating humans to animals or animals to humans. Such analogies may be seen as derogatory to the human referents even if they are only intended to show that animals are also victims of injustice. Meanwhile, if the animals are *only* symbols for race relations, then species relations are not important after all. What might redeem the implied analogy in *Disgrace* is the fact that in Adams's terms, neither 'referent' – animal or racial 'other' – is absent from the novel as a whole, so that the overlap is incomplete: one cannot simply be mapped onto the other. Although Coetzee continues to point to parallels, cultural and species questions appear independently as well as in relation to one another. Indeed, if the novel is seen to criticise Lurie's theorizing and to favour Lucy's practical view, this implies that it is important to read the novel itself on literal as well as other levels; this perspective encourages an interpretation of both race and species relations as serious concerns rather than a reading of one in terms of the other.

In the disagreements between Lurie and Lucy, then, the idea of counterfocalization put forward by Spivak repeatedly comes into play. The reader is privy to all Lurie's thoughts, and only those of Lucy's which she speaks aloud, but when Lurie is dismissive of her ideas, this

³⁵ See Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* 28, 2 (2002): 369-418, 394-95.

³⁶ Costello receives a letter saying 'You took over for your own purposes the familiar comparison between the murdered Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle. The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say... The inversion insults the memory of the dead' (Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 49-50).

can encourage the reader to take them seriously. Thus, while Lurie clings to his Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism, counterfocalization emphasises the conflict between this and the practicalities of his postcolonial world. As the novel progresses, Coetzee then takes the point a significant step further, by having Lurie himself come to acknowledge this conflict.

Animals and Africa

As Lucy seems to have intended, Lurie becomes less able to maintain his theoretical and arguably humanist positions when he is repeatedly confronted with the realities of her life. As Kissack and Titlestad write, 'As an academic and intellectual ... [Lurie] has always articulated and defended abstract schemes and claims. His dependence upon, and faith in, this kind of activity is gradually eroded by his experiences on the farm'.³⁷ The result of this is that his experiences begin to shape his opinions, rather than the reverse.

Even before he philosophises to Lucy about distinctions between humans and other animals, Lurie is already becoming associated with Katy, a dog who has been deserted in Lucy's kennels. He goes out to her cage to interact with her, and addresses her directly, saying, 'Abandoned, are we?' (78). His use of the first person plural appears to be a way of talking down to Katy, as one might to a child, but it also points to a commonality between their positions: both Lurie and Katy are the recipients of what Lucy calls 'refuge on an indefinite basis' (65). Indeed, Philip Armstrong suggests that Lurie especially identifies with dogs 'who are now surplus to the requirements of the new South Africa'.³⁸ If Lurie's choice of pronoun constitutes recognition of this, then that identification has already begun here. Then, when Katy is unresponsive, Lurie proceeds to fall asleep beside her, in what Attridge suggests is an 'ironic parallel with all the women he has slept with'.³⁹ If there is a parallel here, though, it is another instance of Coetzee's overlapping treatment of human and animal concerns. The moment does not reduce Katy to the symbolic; she is significant precisely in her difference from the snakes, foxes and rabbits of Lurie's sexual metaphors. Taken literally, an approach that, I am suggesting, Coetzee advocates as an entirely valid reading, Lurie's nap with Katy is an instance of the sharing with an animal that Lucy recommends.

³⁷ Kissack and Titlestad, 'Humility in a Godless World', 139.

³⁸ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 179.

³⁹ Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 175.

Katy also presents Lurie with a practical example of the plight of animals. Discussing Katy's abandonment, Lucy comments (making an implicit comparison between Katy and Lurie): 'The irony is, she must have offspring all over the district who would be happy to share their homes with her. But it's not in their power to invite her' (78). The effects of this gulf between the powers of humans and other animals are then repeatedly emphasised, and this works to disrupt Lurie's abstract privileging of humans. Despite his attitude, Lurie realises in the course of one visit that what Bev does in the clinic is more ethically complex than he had thought: 'This bleak building is not a place of healing ... but of last resort' (84). Bev cannot necessarily offer the animals a cure at all, and even when she can, human priorities sometimes stand in the way. For instance, on his first day, Lurie sees a buck goat with 'fly-strike' in his scrotum. This goat has frequently been seen as a reference to Lurie's sexuality. For instance, Strobe writes that Coetzee 'indirectly compares Lurie's condition to that of various animals in the novel, including a goat whose testicles have become infested with maggots'.⁴⁰ As a native animal, the goat can of course be read as a symbol of South Africa, his condition perhaps a reference to internal strife. However, the goat's real animality is, like Katy's, at least equally significant. In this case, the issue is the subordination of animal interests to those of humans. Although Bev says that the vet could remove the infected scrotum, this would only benefit the goat: he would become infertile even if his owner could afford the procedure. Human preference also prevents him from receiving a lethal injection. Bev tells Lurie, 'It's their animal, they like to slaughter in their own way' (83).

Lurie also experiences animal death in the clinic on a weekly basis. As Clare Palmer explains in *Killing Animals*, shelter animals are either accidental strays who may be reclaimed, and have a good chance of survival; previously 'homed' animals who are no longer wanted and 'will be assessed for their adoptability'; or abandoned and feral animals, who will probably be killed quickly. The dogs in Bev's clinic do have a period of grace; like the goat, their survival is dependant upon their emotional or economic desirability to humans. When Lurie asks if all of the dogs will die, Bev says, 'Those that no one wants' (85). So many are unwanted that it is a weekly task to dispose of them. Lurie concludes that when people bring

⁴⁰ Strobe, *The Ethics of Exile*, 220. The idea is reinforced by the fact that Lurie gives a passing thought to castration himself: 'He ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself?' (9). His mention of Aphrodite of the foam might also be a reference (presumably unconscious on Lurie's part) to the castration of Cronos.

dogs in, ‘What is being asked for is, in fact, ‘*Lösung* (German always to hand with an appropriately blank abstraction): sublimation, as alcohol is sublimed from water, leaving no residue, no aftertaste’ (142). Palmer follows Tom Regan’s argument that ‘the killing of healthy animals in animal shelters should not be regarded as euthanasia’ because it cannot be in the animals’ own best interests.⁴¹ But in *Disgrace*’s animal clinic, most of the dogs that Bev kills are healthy. They ‘suffer ... most of all from their own fertility’ (142), or rather, the human view of it: Bev says that there are ‘Too many by our standards, not by theirs. They would just multiply and multiply if they had their way, until they filled the earth. They don’t think it’s a bad thing to have lots of offspring’ (85). Perhaps this consideration is also behind the novel’s avoidance of the term ‘euthanasia’. *Lösung*, which Lurie uses instead, is, far more provocatively, part of the term *Die Endlösung* – the final solution. With a degree of subtlety entirely absent from *The Lives of Animals*, Lurie may be making the same comparison between the killing of animals and the Holocaust that is met with such horror by Elizabeth Costello’s audience.⁴² What this underscores is the extent to which the ethics of killing as a solution to what is not, for the dogs, a problem, are being questioned in the novel.

Besides Lurie’s work in the clinic, the other major disruption of his initial attitudes occurs in his attempts to come to terms with an apparently racially motivated attack on the farm. Lucy is robbed and raped while Lurie is attacked and locked in the toilet. Some critics have seen this episode as criminalising black Africans; however, it is, as Attridge writes, important to examine ‘its place in the novel and the responses to it that seem to be endorsed’.⁴³ While it certainly exists in the novel as a catastrophic event, then, its importance lies in Lurie and Lucy’s responses to it, and, where those responses conflict, in their attempts to negotiate between them.

⁴¹ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (London: Routledge, 1984); Clare Palmer, ‘Killing Animals in Shelters,’ in *Killing Animals*, ed. The Animal Studies Group (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 172, 177-78.

⁴² If Lurie is of Jewish descent, a possibility suggested by Attridge (*J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 171, 173n), then perhaps he feels able to make this connection with impunity; here, it is a passing thought, not a claim which he attempts to defend.

⁴³ Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, 170-1. Attridge notes that ‘If we were to use some measure of “realism” to judge the novel, there is nothing implausible about the scene of rural crime that Coetzee introduces’ (170). Indeed, referring to a newspaper article published in the same year as *Disgrace*, Morrell writes, ‘South Africa has the highest rate of rape in the world with an estimated one million women raped a year (*Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 2-8 July 1999)’ (Morrell, ‘The Times of Change’ 20).

For Lurie, his lack of power in respect of the attack leads to a broader questioning of his own autonomy. One aspect of this is his re-evaluation of his European linguistic expertise within his South African context. When Lurie first leaves Cape Town, he is planning to write an operetta based on the relationship between the poet Byron and Teresa Guiccioli. If some of Steve Baker's ideas about postmodern art, which I raised in my introduction, are adapted to apply to these ambitions, Lurie's values might be described as 'expert thinking', which is, Baker argues, seen as counterproductive in the postmodern context.⁴⁴ I would suggest that in the post-apartheid context of *Disgrace*, while Lurie's belief in his expertise might inhibit experimentation in general, what is most unfavourable to creativity in his expert thinking is that his particular expertise is out of place, and so inhibits experimental engagement with his South African context. He wants 'a chamber-play about love and death ... with a complex, restless music behind it, sung in an English that tugs continually toward an imagined Italian' (180). In terms of the argument I am adapting from Baker, perhaps Lurie struggles to begin work on this because his plans are too Eurocentric to facilitate creativity in his post-apartheid South African context. He finds that his language skills are of no use at all once he is staying with Lucy. He falls asleep in front of a football match because does not understand Sotho or Xhosa, only to be woken when Petrus turns the sound back up (75).⁴⁵ This neatly literalises the point: Lurie is slowly waking up to the fact that Petrus's is the relevant linguistic knowledge. The attack makes the same point with more urgency. Lurie can hear what the intruders say but he cannot understand: 'they stand beneath the window, inspecting their prisoner, discussing his fate. He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in Darkest Africa' (95).

Despite the appearance of this imperialistic phrase,⁴⁶ this is a defining moment in terms of Lurie's attitudes. After the attack, he becomes increasingly concerned with the question Coetzee asks in *White Writing*: 'Is there a language in which people of European identity, or if

⁴⁴ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 41.

⁴⁵ Morrell points out that sports, and football in particular, often offer a significant point of commonality between different cultures in South Africa, but here, Lurie cannot participate (Morrell, 'The Times of Change', 18).

⁴⁶ The phrase 'Darkest Africa' appears in the title of nineteenth-century explorer Henry Morton Stanley's diary of his African expedition of 1887-1889, and also of a 1936 serialized film, starring big game hunter and lion tamer Clyde Beatty (as himself) adventuring in Africa. Implicitly, then, Lurie is comparing his position to that of a colonial explorer, but one who does not have the skills to survive in Africa. Henry Morton Stanley, *In Darkest Africa; or, The Quest, Rescue, and Retreat of Emin, Governor of Equatoria* (New York: Scribner's, 1890). *Darkest Africa*, dir. B. Reeves Eason and Joseph Kane. (Republic Pictures, 1936).

not of European identity then of a highly problematical South African-colonial identity, can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa?’⁴⁷ Lurie is increasingly dissatisfied with English: ‘He would not mind hearing Petrus’s story one day. But preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa’ (117). By extension, then, the novel draws attention to its own limits; if the language of Europe is inadequate to the task, then not only is it inappropriate for the white postcolonial writer to tell Petrus’s truth, it is impossible. This is not, therefore, the sort of imperialist silencing of which Parry accuses Coetzee in relation to other texts;⁴⁸ rather, as Spivak argues of *Disgrace*, the refusal to ‘give “voice”’ to the subaltern is ‘a politically fastidious awareness of the limits of its own power’.⁴⁹ The attack, then, is the turning point which confirms, in linguistic terms, the point raised by Lucy’s counterfocalizing role: cultural power relations are shifting in post-apartheid South Africa.

Although the point is made much less overtly, because Lurie does not reflect on it, the events of the attack also raise questions about the superiority of human language in general over other animals’ ways of understanding. During the attack, the three strangers use spoken language to persuade Lucy to let them into the house, while the dogs’ grasp of the situation suggests that theirs is the more reliable source of information. At the first sight of the attackers, ‘The dog at Lucy’s side slows down, bristles’ (91). The boy who accompanies the two men deliberately provokes them; he ‘hisses at the dogs and makes sudden, threatening gestures’. At this, ‘The dog at Lucy’s side tries to tug loose. Even the old bulldog bitch [Katy], whom he seems to have adopted as his own, is growling softly’ (92). Lucy and Lurie see this and are also wary, but their use of human language means that they can also be lied to. The attackers gain access to the house place by talking their way in; they ask to use the telephone because one of their sisters is in labour, and Lucy lets them in, at which point they presumably overpower her. The dogs’ lack of human language is an advantage; it prevents them from being misled. Thus, just as Lucy’s counterfocalization works to question Lurie’s received opinion that humans have immortal souls and animals do not, the dogs’ quicker understanding here questions another point fundamental to humanist species distinctions: the

⁴⁷ Coetzee, *White Writing*, 7-8.

⁴⁸ Parry, ‘Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee’, 3-4.

⁴⁹ Spivak, ‘Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching,’ 24.

superiority of human language. In this way, the linguistic expertise on which Lurie has hitherto relied is arguably twice invalidated.

The attack also forces Lurie to acknowledge his own mortality, and this is presented as a commonality between himself and other animals. During the attack, he, Lucy and the dogs all have the same defensive impulses, but they all become victims together. Lurie thinks, 'His child is in the hand of strangers... *Now* he must do something' (94). But instead, he is locked in the bathroom, his car keys stolen and his hair set on fire; he is quite unable to protect Lucy. With the exception of Katy, the dogs can do nothing to protect Lucy either. They are similarly (if already) locked in, and are then shot by the attackers. Lurie considers their killing 'Contemptible, yet exhilarating, probably, in a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man (110). Thus, the dogs may have been attacked as part of the same racial politics that (Lurie supposes) he and Lucy were. In the aftermath of the attack, Lurie's physical vulnerability is also presented as connecting him with animals while he stays in the Shaws' house. They willingly offer accommodation and care, and Lurie's experience of Bev changing his dressings makes him expressly conscious of the parallel between his own position and that of the animals brought to the shelter: 'He recalls the goat in the clinic, wonders whether, submitting to her hands, it felt the same peacefulness' (106). Lurie has thus gone from a position of relative power, as an urban academic engaging in exploitative sexual relationships with exoticised women, to a position of linguistic inadequacy, vulnerability to his African neighbours, and animal mortality. His individual transition thus reflects the end of the apartheid and underscores the irrelevance of his former assumptions to life in the new South Africa.

After the attack, Lurie changes rapidly. He and Lucy return to the farm, where cultural and animal issues soon come together again in the fate of two sheep, brought home by Petrus to be slaughtered. The sheep become the centre of a dilemma, the cause of which relates to race, and the effect to species. The reason for the sheep's presence is a party to celebrate the transfer of land from Lucy to Petrus. Lucy says, 'It's a big day for him. We should at least put in an appearance, take them a present' (124). However, since Petrus's mysterious absence during the attack, Lurie has regarded him with suspicion, and he increasingly sees his developing power as a threat. This may be one reason for his opposition when Petrus leaves the sheep tethered on bare ground with no water. Lurie asks, 'even if the sheep are for the

party, don't you think they could graze?' (123). When Petrus does not move them, Lurie does. He also considers buying them, but concludes, in a problematic metaphor: 'what will he do with the sheep anyway, once he has bought them out of slavery?' (126). In thinking of their fate in this light, Lurie is making what Marjorie Spiegel calls, in her book of that name, 'the dreaded comparison' between human and animal slavery. To return to Adams' discussion of absent referents, this comparison is 'dreaded' because, like the Holocaust, 'Some terms are so powerfully specific to one group's oppression that their appropriation to others is potentially exploitative'.⁵⁰ Spiegel's position is that this comparison is nevertheless valid, because, 'as diverse as the cruelties and the supporting systems may be ... they share the same basic essence, they are built around the same basic relationship – that between oppressor and oppressed'.⁵¹ Lurie's view of the sheep as slaves stems from a new acknowledgement on his part that they have been 'destined since birth for the butcher's knife ... Sheep do not own themselves, do not own their own lives' (123). Spiegel herself makes the animal-slave comparison with regard to similar circumstances to those of the sheep in *Disgrace*. Likening the transportation of animals to the transportation of slaves, she observes that 'In the United States (as in much of the world), animals on the way to the slaughterhouse are usually not fed as this would "waste" food, the cost of which those in the industry would rather keep as profit'.⁵² However, this cannot be Petrus's reason for starving the sheep, because he does not have to pay for the grass or the water. Because his reason is never given, his behaviour seems unjustified. The idea of Petrus as slave-owner, of course, also has complicated implications. It may be seen as a mark of Petrus's liberation, in that it impedes any parallel between him and oppressed animals, but it presents Petrus as a cruel *baas* or master just at the moment of his liberation.

Again, it is through Lucy that the narrative counters Lurie's attitude. Seen from her perspective, Lurie's reaction to the sheep is metropolitan and unrealistic:

I'm not sure I like the way he does things – bringing the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with the people who are going to eat them.

⁵⁰ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 54.

⁵¹ Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (New York: Mirror Books, 1996), 28.

⁵² Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*, 58.

What would you prefer? That the slaughtering be done in an abattoir, so that you needn't think about it?

Yes.

Wake up, David. This is the country. This is Africa. (124)

Thus, Lucy does not pass judgement on Petrus's methods because the fate of the sheep is typical of the realities of rural meat-production, and perhaps because the alternative involves participation in a deception. Lucy's own vegetarianism may be motivated by her awareness of the realities; Spiegel suggests, perhaps naïvely, that without the secrecy surrounding most meat production, the market for it might decline:

in order to avoid change in our lives or habits – which might be the inevitable result of a sober appraisal of the system – we must participate in perpetuating our own ignorance of reality. We must be able to disassociate the actual producers – the animals themselves – from the 'products:' fur, meat, milk, eggs, etc. Or we must be able to pretend that everyone is happy down on the farm.⁵³

What Lucy is suggesting is that that farm life in Africa does not deal in such illusions or permit such denial; it deals in practice, not theory. It certainly leaves Lurie's new sensibilities unprotected. The issue thus disrupts his imperialistic leanings again, as Coetzee inverts the pastoral idealisation of country life. Coetzee writes, 'To pastoral art the West has assigned the task of asserting the virtues of the garden – simplicity, peace, immemorial usage – against the vices of the city: luxury, competitiveness, novelty'.⁵⁴ Finding his initial impressions of the simple country life contradicted, Lurie now becomes very critical of the realities:

It seems a miserable way to spend the last two days of one's life. Country ways – that is what Lucy calls this kind of thing. He has other words: indifference, hardheartedness.

If the country can pass judgment on the city, then the city can pass judgment on the country too. (125)

Lurie is thus indignant where Lucy is accepting, but he is breaking with his earlier idealisation and with the literary genre that seemed to inform it, perceiving that it is at odds with the practical realities.

⁵³ Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*, 82.

⁵⁴ Coetzee, *White Writing*, 3-4.

Lurie's judgement also shows that although he is no happier about the sheep, he is no longer blaming Petrus personally. This confirms that Lurie's concern with the sheep is not just a symptom of tension with Petrus; it is also motivated by compassion for them.

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him. (126)

Correctly, then, Lucy attributes his reluctance to attend the party to his feelings about the sheep rather than Petrus. Indeed, as a result of his reflection that sheep do not own themselves, Lurie has been revising his default position regarding animal souls.

They exist to be used, every last ounce of them, their flesh to be eaten, their bones to be crushed and fed to poultry. Nothing escapes, except perhaps the gall bladder...

Descartes should have thought of that. The soul, suspended in the dark, bitter gall, hiding. (123-24)

This shows that Lurie is now reflecting on such ideas for himself instead of simply citing the ideas of the 'Church fathers' as he did at first. He no longer regards key ideas in European philosophy as any more reliable than European languages, because he can no longer ignore his *emotional* response. He says to Lucy, 'I still don't believe that animals have properly individual lives. Which among them get to live, which get to die, is not, as far as I am concerned, worth agonizing over. Nevertheless... in this case I am disturbed' (127). Lurie's words show that, in his own mind, he is struggling to negotiate between theory and practice: his approach at this point is still a failing attempt to lead with reason, instead of with his sympathies. However, the latter impulse is clearly becoming stronger.

In the attack and in the slaughter of the sheep, then, the issues of race and species relations which Lucy's counterfocalization has already presented as serious are brought home to Lurie through first-hand experiences. Nostalgic, rather pastoral notions of rural South Africa are shown to be irrelevant; there is inter-racial and inter-species violence, and someone like Lurie is not in a position to change these facts. Lucy also continues to function as a foil to Lurie in their conversations about the sheep, where she is resigned to circumstances which he is not ready to accept. In relation to this question of humility, however, the novel is more

ambiguous; Lurie comes much closer to Lucy's position in relation to animals, but she remains a counterfocalizer in terms of race relations.

Humility

Lucy's counterfocalizing capacity in *Disgrace* derives in large part from the fact that she is prepared to make compromises, while, as evidenced in his resignation from the university, Lurie would rather give up what he has than compromise in order to keep it. If the tone of the first section of the novel presents this facet of Lurie's personality with irony, the subsequent juxtaposition with Lucy has a similar effect. Indeed, Lucy herself identifies Lurie's obstinacy as a character flaw. When they discuss what happened in Cape Town, she tells him, 'You shouldn't be so unbending, David. It isn't heroic to be unbending' (66). Lucy herself models a white postcolonial version of humility, including what I am terming species posthumanism. Although she is white, she does not otherwise fit into the traditional concept of the humanist subject; she is female, lesbian, and does not believe in the superiority of Europeans or humans. To the extent that Lurie changes in this respect, however, he does so not because of the persuasiveness of Lucy's arguments, but the persuasiveness of lived experiences. The change in Lurie is such that Kissack and Titlestad claim that his 'ethical disposition, completely divested of any transcendent or optimistic expectation, one that in fact embraces the perversity of life, becomes a clear example of secular humility'. Whether or not Lurie does fully attain humility remains questionable, and Lucy's display of extreme humility is presented ambiguously. For Lurie, though, in relation to species relations, gender relations, race relations and art, the novel appears to advocate an attitude of humility over an arrogance that, I suggest, can be read as a humanist privileging of the human, the male and the European.

Kissack and Titlestad's description of Lurie's 'new attitude to others' underscores the break from his initial Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism. They write that it is 'not the product of rational deliberation, but of intuition and "sympathetic imagination", particularly in relation to the dogs that he encounters at the animal clinic'.⁵⁵ Certainly, in multiple aspects of Lurie's life, lived experiences replace abstract European theory as the grounds for his opinions. Lurie has a breakthrough in terms of animals when, at Petrus's party, he is confronted with what he had most feared about attending: he is given a plate of mutton. This

⁵⁵ Kissack and Titlestad, 'Humility in a Godless World', 137.

confirms the shift in his attitudes. The idea that humans could be answerable to animals – the same idea which he had once found ridiculous in Bev’s concerns about meat-eating – is encapsulated in his own reaction to it: ‘I am going to eat this and ask forgiveness afterwards’ (131). Killing the dogs in the clinic now becomes a very complex experience for him too. ‘His whole being is gripped by what happens in the theatre. He is convinced the dogs know their time has come ... They flatten their ears, they droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying’ (143). Here, as Armstrong writes, ‘Lurie is overtaken by a form of affect he cannot comprehend... The form of sympathy that possesses Lurie ... cannot be dealt with intellectually’.⁵⁶ Instead, the reasons for his behaviour are emotional. The word ‘too’ in the description of the dogs’ reaction to death suggests that Lurie experiences his own mortality as disgrace, and is identifying with the dogs. Perhaps this is also one reason for his response to their bodies, which he also fails to explain rationally: he incinerates them himself rather than leaving it for the hospital staff to do. He knows he is not helping the dogs in any rational way; instead, as Elizabeth Costello advises, he is listening to what his heart says, acting for the sake of ‘his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing’ (146). Perhaps he is also reluctant to see them treated this way because he is thinking of their souls too, which he still sees them as tied to their bodies: ‘the black bags are piled at the door, each with a body and a soul inside’ (161). At the very end of the novel, he thinks of their souls as leaving their bodies after death: ‘here the soul is yanked out of the body; briefly it hangs about in the air, twisting and contorting; then it is sucked away and gone’ (219). This suggests that he no longer imagines animal souls as tied to the body, but the description of the soul struggling and then sucked away suggests that he may not be thinking of it as immortal either. This re-conceptualisation of the nature of animal souls reflects his re-evaluation of the relationship between species. Lurie clearly acts according to his heart in what Bev calls ‘escorting’ the shelter animals to their deaths: ‘He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love’ (219). Thus, the detached anthropocentrism of Lurie’s figurative use of animals and his default position that humans are a separate order of being has given way: he is honouring supposedly unreasoning nonhuman animals on the basis of a thoroughly emotional engagement with them.

⁵⁶ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 221.

That engagement can also be seen to facilitate another aspect of Lurie's departure from the traditional figure of the humanist subject, and his increasing ability to relate to others. When Lurie first meets Bev, he is put off. She is not exotic to him like Soraya and Melanie, and 'He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive' (72). However, in the clinic, he lets Bev instigate a sexual relationship. On the one hand, Lurie's initial attitude to this seems misogynistic. He regards his participation as a kind of charity – 'So that in the end Bev Shaw can feel pleased with herself' (150) – and as shameful to himself.

Let me not forget this day, he tells himself, lying beside her when they are spent. After the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs, this is what I have come to... And let him stop calling her poor Bev Shaw. If she is poor, he is bankrupt. (150)

On the other hand, if he does not desire Bev, then he participates only for her sake. Strode argues that 'Lurie ... gives of himself sexually – he makes love to Bev Shaw, an act that only she seems to take pleasure in, that reflects a radical reorientation toward the other in his sexual self-conception' just as he 'gives of himself in a humane way as a caretaker for animals being put to sleep in Bev's clinic'.⁵⁷ Indeed, although the novel does not equate Bev with the animals, Lurie's relationships with them may be connected because it is always after the weekly killing of the dogs that he and Bev have intercourse. This point is significant because it remains constant while Lurie's misogyny diminishes and the relationship becomes asexual and more genuine. 'He and Bev Shaw lie in each other's arms on the floor of the surgery' (161). 'They have not made love; they have in effect ceased to pretend that that is what they do together' (162). Instead, they lie embracing after 'The business of dog-killing is over for the day' and talk over Lurie's concerns (161-162). These points imply that because the killing of the dogs is upsetting for both of them, their relationship is most important as a source of emotional comfort rather than physical pleasure. Lurie's relationship with Bev, then, continues his gradual break with humanist assumptions in two ways. The relaxation of his sexist attitudes can be read as a departure from humanism in that he is ceasing to privilege the male. Additionally, in contrast to his conceptualisation of Soraya and Melanie as figurative snake, fox or rabbit, and of himself as having a dog's irrepressible animal sexuality, his relationship with Bev occurs *in the context* of animal realities: the experiences of dogs are no longer his parallels for his behaviour, but perhaps, a reason for it.

⁵⁷ Strode, *The Ethics of Exile*, 222-23.

Although the vestiges of colonial exoticisation are also absent from this relationship, however, Lurie's humility is less developed in terms of race; he struggles with the new power relations in South Africa, only just able to 'bend' far enough to accept Lucy's position, let alone agree with it. Lucy remains a counterfocalizer to Lurie in terms of race, and their views are so opposed that Spivak observes, 'If we, like Lurie, ignore the enigma of Lucy, the novel, being fully focalized precisely by Lurie, can be made to say every racist thing'.⁵⁸ Lucy, meanwhile, takes her already developed humility to a drastic extreme as a result of her rape. She seems prepared to agree with Lurie that the attack was a racially motivated retaliation and an assertion of re-empowerment, but refuses to report the rape. Lurie does not understand: 'Do you think what happened here was an exam: if you come through, you get a diploma and safe conduct into the future...?' 'Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out?' (112). The reader is overtly encouraged to counterfocalize; Lucy replies 'You keep misreading me... I don't act in terms of abstractions' (112). Lucy in fact seems to believe the opposite of what Lurie suggests: 'what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something' (158). Lurie sees this as slavery, but she says, 'Not slavery. Subjection. Subjugation' (159). Finally, pregnant from the rape, Lucy accepts Petrus's proposal of marriage: 'he can put out whatever story he likes about our relationship... But then the child becomes his too... I will sign the land over to him as long as the house remains mine... And I keep the kennels' (204). The opposition between the characters here results in lasting unease about Lucy's choice. The novel does appear to advocate a secular humility in terms of race relations and species relations, but does not offer any real suggestion about what form this should take, or how far it should go. However, Lurie finally brings himself to accept this by comparing Lucy to a dog (Lucy speaks first):

Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.
Like a dog.
Yes, like a dog. (205)

⁵⁸ Spivak, 'Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching', 24.

As Armstrong comments, ‘By now the novel has taught the reader to accord this kind of simile a full range of meanings from the literal to the emblematic’.⁵⁹ This one works not on the basis of a concept like the snakes and rabbits of Lurie’s earlier metaphors, but on the basis of an understanding of real dogs, which could even be read in this passage as something akin to role models for Lucy’s chosen white postcolonial position in their possession of this nothing. Thus, while the reference to a dog’s lack of dignity might be something of a cliché in another context, in *Disgrace* it connects to and values animal realities instead of effacing them.

Although Lurie struggles to come to terms with Lucy’s degree of humility in relation to Africans, and he is certainly not left with nothing in the same way, he does abandon his elitism in the writing of his opera. To return to my adaptation of Steve Baker’s argument, Lurie thus lets go of the Eurocentric ‘expert thinking’ which inhibits, and this permits an engagement with the local and the experiential. ‘Formally speaking, the conception is not a bad one’ (180), yet ‘the project has failed to engage the core of him. There is something misconceived about it, something that does not come from the heart’ (181). This recalls the opposition between reason and feeling made by Elizabeth Costello; now, Lurie is trying to express himself. However, having acknowledged that he does not have the right language to access ‘the truth of South Africa’ as it would be told by Petrus, he must experiment in order to find a way of telling another story. The resulting opera takes on a different form from what he initially intended, breaking the conventions, of character and music in particular, and possibly even of species, which might make for a posthumanist opera.

Arguably reflecting the counterfocalizing role played by Lucy, the focus of Lurie’s opera shifts from Byron to Teresa. Additionally, Teresa now looks, in Lurie’s mind, much more like Bev. Rather than being a youthful, idealised member of elite society, Lurie now sees her as middle-aged, ordinary and perhaps rural: ‘The new Teresa is a dumpy little widow... The passage of time has not treated Teresa kindly. With her heavy bust, her stocky trunk, her abbreviated legs, she looks more like a peasant, a *Contadina*, than an aristocrat’ (181). Lurie asks himself, as if taking on Lucy’s earlier accusations about his taste in women, ‘Can he find it in his heart to love this plain, ordinary woman? Can he love her enough to write a music for her? If he cannot, what is left for him?’ (182). Apparently, he can. He

⁵⁹ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 185.

begins to write, first the words, and then, although he had intended to borrow it (63), he writes the music too. It is through this music that the opera comes to inhabit this postcolonial space. The problem of localised creation is of course a self-reflexive feature of the novel; the process in question is not just that of writing, but of white postcolonial writing in South Africa, which as Coetzee argues, requires a means of expression that is neither African nor European. Coetzee's subtle inclusions of the local, in the duiker and the goat, for instance, are examples of his own response to this problem, in that they remind the reader of the novel's setting, while simultaneously exposing Lurie's initially problematic relation to that space. Indeed, when Lurie comes to write the opera, Coetzee continues to include such details through Lurie's doing so. Finding that his piano sounds 'too rounded, too physical, too rich' (184), he uses a banjo – indeed, a toy banjo. The surprising appearance of this un-operatic instrument is obviously an instance of creative dissent. Moreover, that Lurie chooses a banjo in particular means that the piece is also an instance of cultural hybridity, because the instrument is of African origin. Having once applied classical imagery to Melanie during her performance of a South African comedy, he is now using an African instrument as the only accompaniment to an opera set in Italy. Homi Bhabha writes, 'The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation'.⁶⁰ Although he is not working 'from the minority perspective', Lurie's opera is an attempt to find a mode of representation appropriate to his in-between, non-European, non-African position. He has struggled to relate to South Africa through language, but in the opera, he perhaps begins to do so through music.

Six months ago he had thought his own ghostly place in *Byron in Italy* would be somewhere between Teresa's and Byron's: between a yearning to prolong the summer of the passionate body and a reluctant recall from the long sleep of oblivion. (184).

Instead, he now connects with the sound of the banjo.

It is not the erotic that is calling to him after all, nor the elegiac, but the comic ... he is held in the music itself, in the flat, tinny slap of the banjo strings, the voice that strains to soar away from the ludicrous instrument but is continually reined back, like a fish on a line. (184-85)

⁶⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders,' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

This new self-deprecating and localised view of himself signals the passing of his elitist and Europeanised aspirations, and their replacement with an instance of cultural hybridity. This reflects the condition in which Lurie, as a white South African, now finds himself. Instead of seeing himself as an academic writing serious, European-style music, he has come to see himself as comic, playful, and a postcolonial hybrid: with a European history but grounded in South Africa. In this way, Lurie's opera offers an answer to the linguistic (and therefore cultural) dilemma which he has encountered during the novel. He may not be able to hear Petrus's truth, but he can produce his own, white postcolonial, hybrid truth of South Africa. In light of the meta-literary element, perhaps this might also be seen to express Coetzee's hope of doing the same.

Furthermore, Lurie's opera entails not only a cultural but a species hybridity. As well as mixing European and African elements, it also mixes human with canine voices. Animals, whose self-expression is not always thought to qualify as language at all, are relevant to the opera perhaps for this very reason. Since Lurie has lost esteem for language, including his own, this may be why the 'non-language' of a dog appeals to him. In this respect, Baker's argument may be adapted to apply to *Disgrace*, as animals begin to contribute to the production of art. Baker's idea is not that animals do this actively or voluntarily; rather, they make a conceptual contribution. He writes, 'If the adoption of an animal perspective can itself aid the artist in working against the worst effects of an 'expert' conception of knowledge, the importance of the animal to artists is hardly surprising'. This could obviously entail a somewhat instrumental approach to animals. Baker repeatedly emphasises that artists who include animals in their work are not necessarily doing so because they are 'pro-animal'; 'postmodern art has dealt with the animal across a spectrum ranging from the *animal-endorsing* to the *animal-sceptical*'. He explains:

Animal-endorsing art will tend to endorse animal life itself (and may therefore align itself with the work of conservationists, or perhaps of animal advocacy), rather than endorsing cultural constructions of the animal. Animal-sceptical art, on the contrary, is likely to be sceptical not of animals themselves ... but rather of culture's means of constructing and classifying the animal in order to make it meaningful to the human.⁶¹

⁶¹ Baker, *The Postmodern Animal*, 49, 9.

Thus, neither approach endorses cultural constructions of animals. Therefore, the existence of a postmodern (or in this case, postcolonial) motive for including animals in art need not preclude the coexistence of an animal-endorsing motive. In *Disgrace*, experiences of animals lead to the disruption of Lurie's preconceptions, both about them and about himself, *because* he comes to identify with them. Thus, they irrupt into his art not perhaps in the same way but with the same effect as that which Baker describes. The animal contribution to creative disorder appears as literally discordant in *Byron in Italy*, as Lurie considers the possibility of including a dog in the opera. For the dog who has adopted him is very interested in his project:

The dog is fascinated by the sound of the banjo ... and seems on the point of singing too, or howling. Would he dare to do that: bring a dog into the piece, allow it to loose its own lament to the heavens between the strophes of lovelorn Teresa's? Why not?

Surely, in a work that will never be performed, all things are permitted? (215)

Of course, the question about the inclusion of a dog in the opera is also a self-referent comment on Coetzee's part, foregrounding the presence of animals in *Disgrace* (and *The Lives of Animals*) and emphasising that the question of human-animal relations can also be treated seriously within writing which *is* for public consumption. For Lurie, the idea of including the dog is a response to what he now perceives as the problem of the privileging of humans at the expense of animals; it makes a significant bridge across the species divide. Now, far from separating animals from his intellectual 'higher life', Lurie is tempted to combine the two. For in his life, they are now interconnected; he no longer has a sense of a higher life than this one, which he shares with animals.

However, although Lurie's perspective now approaches what I am calling species posthumanism, in that he no longer considers humans exceptional or superior, this is not presented as offering a solution for animals because he does not have the power to undo their general 'unwantedness'. Instead, Lurie is resigned to the fate of the dogs in the clinic in the same way that, earlier, Lucy is resigned to that of the sheep. This resignation is underscored at the very end of the novel, in relation to the dog who likes music.

It is not 'his' in any sense; he has been careful not to give it a name (though Bev Shaw refers to it as *Driepoot*); nevertheless, he is sensible of a generous affection streaming out toward him from the dog. Arbitrarily, unconditionally, he has been adopted. (215)

That Lurie is aware of the dog's attitude to him shows that he is now recognising animal subjectivity and affection. However, while this reverses the usual species relations of adoptions at the shelter, it does so without reversing the power relations: the dog's adoption of Lurie could spell rescue (and it does lead to some preferential treatment), but of course, this is up to Lurie, who never appears to consider adopting him in return. Instead, just as he decides against buying the sheep out of their 'slavery' (for practical reasons), Lurie chooses to accept the dog's death. He agrees with Bev that the killing gets harder all the time, but, in an observation connected to his acceptance of mortality, he finds, 'One gets used to things getting harder; one ceases to be surprised that what used to be as hard as hard can be grows harder yet' (219). '[A] time must come, it cannot be evaded, when he will have to bring him to Bev Shaw' (219). 'Bearing him in his arms like a lamb, he re-enters the surgery... "Yes, I am giving him up"' (220).

This decision, which constitutes the final line in the novel, goes largely unexplained within the text. Lurie himself obviously feels that there is no possibility of adopting the dog. Earlier, in relation to the sheep, he says that he does not believe that animals have properly individual lives and that it is not worth agonizing over which live or die, but that in this case he is disturbed (127). In the case of the dog, he is again disturbed and he may now believe that animals do have properly individual lives, but perhaps he feels that he cannot afford, emotionally, to agonize over which live or die. The possible meanings of Lurie's decision within the novel are also complex. Armstrong raises two possible interpretations. One of these relates to the problem of possessions:

what Lurie is really giving up when he offers Driepoot for euthanasia is the prerogative of maintaining a privileged category of saved animals, whose existence is permitted only insofar as it is encompassed by the property rights which underlie contemporary capitalist societies.

In that case, giving up the dog 'is perhaps Lurie's version of starting again, with nothing'. Alternatively, Armstrong suggests, the decision might be interpreted as an abstract sacrifice on Lurie's part. He writes, 'According to this perspective, Lurie ... remains caught within the structure of humanism, as expressed by its characteristic treatment of non-human life'. 'The final reduction of Driepoot to a... sacrificial token – 'like a lamb to the slaughter' – ...repeats the earlier tendency to treat animals in the abstract or turn them into metaphors and thus

surrenders to the anthropocentric metaphysics of *Lösung*'.⁶² My reading lies somewhere between those offered by Armstrong: I would argue that Lurie's decision to give the dog up is, as the expression implies, one of surrender; that is, an acknowledgement of his own powerlessness. In terms of the broader picture of both species and race relations, to rescue the dog would perpetuate the illusion of an agency that Lurie does not in fact possess. To bring him willingly contrasts with Lurie's earlier, more humanist view of himself as thoroughly autonomous, as displayed in his presumptuous behaviour towards Soraya and Melanie and his almost offended reactions to events like the slaughter of the sheep and Lucy's decision to join Petrus's household, as if he should not have to tolerate anything he does not like. The surrendering of the dog without a struggle does not necessarily make the dog a symbol, according to this reading; it simply reflects Lurie's new capacity for acceptance. Therefore, if Lurie *is* on one level sacrificing the dog, and the reference to the lamb does gesture in this direction, then he is sacrificing him not to humanism, but perhaps to humility. Lurie is acknowledging that there are limits to his own power to, as Lucy puts it, 'share some of [his] human privilege with the beasts' (74), because there are limits to that privilege in the first place. For this reason, although the novel challenges the Eurocentric and anthropocentric values which, I argued, aligned Lurie with humanism, and although his new view of life as shared with animals approaches what I am terming species posthumanism, there are no easy solutions.

Conclusion

Through Lurie's development in *Disgrace*, and through the counterfocalization on Lucy which runs alongside it, the representation of concerns regarding non-human animals and white post-apartheid identity work productively together to disrupt attitudes to otherness which I am regarding as humanist. In terms of human-animal relations, Lucy models perspectives and practices which foreground alternatives to the abstract, anthropocentric and often Eurocentric concepts which dominate Lurie's thinking and actions. Then, practical experiences of rural life in South Africa force Lurie to re-evaluate his preconceptions. The result of this is that his opinions become informed by practice instead of theory, and they effectively align with Lucy's after all; he comes to feel that animals are beings to whom

⁶² Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 186.

humans have responsibilities, and develops reluctant and then fully-accepted compassion for them, both living and dead. In these respects, his new perspective approaches what I call species posthumanism. However, Lucy retains her counterfocalizing role in matters of race relations. After the attack, Lurie strongly disagrees with her decision to keep the child of the rape, to give up her land and to become Petrus's 'wife' in exchange for protection rather than leave the farm. When Lucy gives him no choice, his eventual acceptance seems to be facilitated by the comparison he makes between her humility and that of dogs. For himself, Lurie acknowledges his own limitations, both physically as he ages and in terms of his cultural expertise, and he comes to terms with his white South African status through writing an opera which is culturally hybrid. He also considers the possibility of adding a canine voice, and making it a species hybrid as well.

These points would seem to suggest that engagement with the question of animals can offer a productive way of re-envisioning and re-articulating the white postcolonial condition; in *Disgrace*, this is conducive to the development of a degree of humility which the novel presents as necessary for white South Africa. This in turn seems to connect to Cary Wolfe's point that undermining speciesism is a necessary step in undermining imperialistic attitudes.⁶³ However, *Disgrace* also suggests ways in which it is possible to go beyond Wolfe's suggestion. Animals in *Disgrace* are certainly not exclusively representative of human concerns; the point that Lucy makes, that humans simply *share* life with animals and, by implication, are not a separate order of creation, seems to be endorsed by the novel.

To this extent, then, *Disgrace* can be seen as a post-apartheid example of what I term species posthumanism: for Lucy, Bev and gradually for Lurie, anthropocentrism is challenged in a way that, without equating species and race relations, reflects the changing cultural politics of the new South Africa. However, the opposition to humanism within white postcolonial literature does not necessarily contest the subordination of animals. In the next chapter, I explore the contrasting approach taken in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, which, adapting Althusser's ideas, I describe as 'theoretical anti-humanist', because this novel opposes excessive rationalism but promotes a coherent, autonomous view of humanity, using animals for both purposes.

⁶³ Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7-8.

2. A story with animals: theoretical anti-humanism in *Life of Pi*

Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001) is in many ways very different from *Disgrace* and indeed in the other novels addressed in this thesis.¹ In particular, the extent to which it can be seen to challenge humanism is limited. *Life of Pi* does not seek to undermine in all respects the figure of the western male rationalist human who is superior to all other humans and animals, in the way that I suggested *Disgrace* does. It overtly challenges the value of rationalism, but it concentrates on largely male characters, its non-western content is mediated by white Canadian perspectives, and although animals are used as part of the disruption of rationalism, the humanist notion of the coherent human subject is maintained through what Derrida calls the 'sacrifice' of the other.² In this respect, I suggest, *Life of Pi* can be read as offering a version of Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism. The rejection of rationalism can arguably be understood to undermine the theoretical basis for the humanist privileging of the western, the masculine and the human, yet the novel maintains the ideological centrality of these three characteristics of the humanist subject.

In its focus on the Indian character of Pi and his rejection of rationalism, the novel's approach has something in common with Elleke Boehmer's observation that

Like post-structuralist theory ... it followed that the writing of decolonization would put in question some of the respected assumptions of earlier imperial times: the faith in the superiority of western rationality, for example, and in the universalizing potential of that rationality.³

Rationalism is perceived in *Life of Pi* as offering too limited a perspective, impeding the full experience of joy in life and faith in the divine that is modelled by Pi, and I read this as the novel's rejection of one aspect of humanism. Additionally, the novel displays an appreciation and celebration of postcolonial culture, in terms of the workings of cultural hybridity in India and, to some extent, Canada. However, *Life of Pi* is not the writing of decolonisation that Boehmer describes. Despite its focus on Pi, the novel does not succeed in marginalising the western perspective, for two reasons. Firstly, Pi's story is framed by and mediated by western

¹ Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (2001; repr., Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2003).

² Jacques Derrida, 'Eating Well, or, The Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', trans E. Cadava and A. Tomiche, in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. E. Cadava, P. Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy, (New York: Routledge 1991), 113.

³ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 238.

voices. Martel does not show Coetzee's caution about who tells whose story, and his white Canadian presentation of an Indian character's story risks being perceived as ventriloquism. Within the world of the novel, the frame narrator who interviews Pi in Canada and chooses to tell his story in the first person is also a white Canadian writer (Martel is playing with the idea that this character might be himself). Secondly, both his and Pi's narratives put the reader in the position of tourist in relation to what is Indian. The frame narrator describes the adult Pi and his house in Canada in terms of exotic similes. The 'Indian lilt' to Pi's accent is 'like a trace of incense in the air' (xiii), and he has a 'Pleasing coffee-coloured complexion' (7). 'His spice rack looks like an apothecary's shop' (24), and 'His house is a temple' (45). Ironically, this exoticising is also echoed by Pi's narrative; indeed, Philip Armstrong suggests that 'Pi's sensibility is, more than anything else, that of the tourist'.⁴ Pi says, 'I miss the heat of India, the food, the house lizards on the walls, the musicals on the silver screen, the cows wandering the streets' (6). He says that he is Hindu because of 'sculptured cones of red kumkum powder and baskets of yellow turmeric nuggets, because of garlands of flowers and pieces of broken coconut, because of the clanging of bells to announce one's arrival to God' (47). Although such details are often presented as Pi's nostalgia, they again put the reader in the position of a tourist, a consumer of the exotic.

Because of *Life of Pi*'s selective challenge to humanism, its representation of animals has much the same effect. Animals are central to the opposition to rationalism, but the novel avoids challenging the concept of the supremacy of humans. The narrative begins with an 'Author's Note' in which the frame narrator tells of travelling to India and meeting a man called Adirubasamy, who says that Pi Patel's story 'will make you believe in God' (xii). The treatment of animals works towards this purpose, in two related ways. Firstly, animals provide evidence of the surprising extent of God's creation, beyond the comprehension of a strictly rationalist perspective. In Parts I and II of the narrative, they repeatedly come into play as unpredictable and remarkable. They include zoo animals first in zoos and then in Pi's life boat, the sea creatures around him, and finally a colony of meerkats living on an effectively magic realist floating island of carnivorous algae. All of these animals disrupt human categorisations and defy expectations. However, the effect is that, as Armstrong

⁴ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction that Modernity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 179.

suggests, '[Pi's] affection for zoos as embodiments of the wonder of nature ... suggest[s] the superficial perspective of the transient visitor'.⁵ Animals appear as a form of spectacle; they are present in the narrative because they are exotic, as the objects of interest and even fascination, but seldom of concern in themselves. Indeed, in its representation of animals, *Life of Pi* as a whole might be regarded, conceptually speaking, as a kind of zoo itself.

Thus, despite the subversive approach to rationalism, the novel does not question humans' position in relation to other species. On the contrary, animals' other role in the novel is as essential constitutive others: Pi's humanist view of himself as superior to animals is apparently necessary to his morale and his religious faith (thus, with the exception of extreme rationalism, which is seen to encourage atheism, humanism and religion are compatible in this novel). In the first story of Pi's survival, he overtly constructs himself as zookeeper and tiger-tamer in relation to a tiger called Richard Parker.⁶ In a second story elicited by two men who come to interview Pi, Richard Parker is absent and Pi's sense of his human exceptionality is threatened because there is nothing to set it against; in particular, another survivor, who is killed by the tiger in the first story, is murdered by Pi in the second. However, Pi's choice of 'the better story', also accepted by his interviewers, works to recover his status by retaining the animals as a counterpoint to his coherent human subjectivity. Although there could be some authorial distance from Pi's construction of animals in the novel, there is no specific evidence of this. There is none of the counterfocalization that *Disgrace* offers through Lucy; the only candidates for this would be the frame narrator or Pi's interviewers, but they all come to agree with Pi about stories, and never raise questions about human-animal relations. This suggests, if inconclusively, that the retention of an anthropocentric view of humans is the novel's as well as Pi's.

⁵ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 179.

⁶ According to Pi, Richard Parker is accidentally given the name of the hunter who kills his mother, an administrative error which is allowed to go uncorrected. Richard Parker is also the name of multiple victims of castaway cannibalism, fictional and nonfictional. Survivors cannibalise a man of this name in a novel by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, 1838, ed. Richard Kopley (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 1999). In 1846, survivors from the *Francis Spaight* cannibalised a man named Richard Parker, and in 1884, survivors from the *Mignonette* in 1884 cannibalised their cabin boy, also called Richard Parker or 'the boy Parker', resulting in the criminal case of *R. v. Dudley and Stephens*. See A.W. Brian Simpson, *Cannibalism and the Common Law: A Victorian Yachting Tragedy* (London: Hambledon, 1994); Neil Hanson, *The Custom of the Sea* (1999; repr., London: Corgi Books, 2000). Martel has commented, 'So many victimized Richard Parkers had to mean something. My tiger found his name. He's a victim, too--or is he?' Yann Martel, 'How Richard Parker Came to Get His Name', <http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=309590>.

There is, then, a paradoxical tension between the disruption of rationalism that can be seen as anti-humanist, and the novel's humanist construction of the human subject as superior to other species. I suggest that this apparent paradox can be understood by applying Althusser's concept of theoretical anti-humanism: a foundational precept of humanism is rejected, but humanist ideologies are still regarded as valuable. In this chapter, I begin by examining the representation of Pi's childhood in Pondicherry (now Puducherry),⁷ where cultural and species juxtapositions and human and animal escapes reflect one another, but where zoos themselves are defended and the human boundary is maintained. I then examine the role of animals within the stories of Pi's survival at sea, the first being Pi's preferred, remarkable story and the second the strictly rational one elicited by his interviewers. I argue that the contrast between the two stories illustrates the centrality of the symbolic sacrifice of animals to humanist constructions of the subject.

Disrupting boundaries

The danger of excessive rationalism, according to the perspective of *Life of Pi*, is that to deny what is not logically explicable is to miss much of the value of life. Pi's biology teacher Mr Kumar is to Pi an example of rationality taken too far. He tells Pi that 'There are no grounds for going beyond a scientific explanation of reality and no sound reason for believing anything other than our sense experience' (27). He explains that suffering from polio as a child led him to ask 'Where is God?', but 'God never came' and instead medicine saved him (28). As an atheist biologist, Mr Kumar thinks of the zoo run by Pi's family as his 'temple' because it confirms what he believes. However, it has a similar role for Pi, who is very religious. The zoo is one of many sources of surprising and uplifting events in the novel, which disrupt rationalist categories and explanations. It is presented as it might be encountered by an unsuspecting visitor to the Botanical Garden (where the zoo is located).

Suddenly, amidst the tall and slim trees up ahead, you notice two giraffes quietly observing you... The next moment you are startled by a furious outburst coming from a troupe of monkeys, only outdone in volume by the shrill cries of strange birds... What can you expect beyond a low wall? Certainly not a shallow pit with two mighty Indian rhinoceros. (13)

⁷ In 2006 Pondicherry became Puducherry, but I follow the novel's usage for the sake of clarity.

Animals repeatedly function in this way as sources of surprise and, to some extent, they challenge imposed categories in ways that resonate with the novel's celebration of cultural hybridity. For instance, cross-species cooperation and cohabitation on the part of zoo animals are often presented as acceptable and even admirable from the point of view of the human characters. Pi's general examples of this include dogs wanting human acceptance, dolphins keeping humans afloat, circus lions accepting the mastery of human tamers, and dogs fostering lion cubs (84, 85). Examples from the Patels' zoo include human-orchestrated co-habitations that result in companionships, such as golden agouti and the spotted paca 'contentedly huddling together and sleeping against each other' (84),⁸ and a rhinoceros that joins a herd of goats. While humans find these arrangements 'surprising', so much so that 'we had to put up a sign pointing out that rhinoceroses are herbivores and do not eat goats' (85), they are understood in positive terms. Pi suggests that the acceptance of another species is a way of meeting social requirements. 'The golden agouti, like the rhinoceros, was in need of companionship. The circus lions don't care to know that their leader is a weakling human; the fiction guarantees their social wellbeing and staves off violent anarchy' (85-86). The relevance of these points to human concerns is underscored when Mr Kumar comments, 'If we had politicians like these goats and rhinos we'd have fewer problems in our country' (27).

Although there is not the same explicit comparison, the animals' cross-species arrangements can also be connected to the novel's exploration of multicultural cohabitation, via the Patel family's cultural hybridity. In *Post-colonial Transformation*, Bill Ashcroft emphasises that 'colonized communities are more than simply the objects of imperialism'. He writes, 'the model of post-colonial societies reveals that local empowerment comes by means of the creative interpolation of the dominant, and increasingly a globally dominant, discourse'.⁹ Culturally borrowing in the opposite direction, then, from *Disgrace*'s Lurie in his use of the banjo in his opera, the Patels and their friend Adirubasamy are shown interpolating various European influences, but often giving them a new application in the Indian context. Adirubasamy has studied in Paris 'in the early 1930s, when the French were still trying to make Pondicherry as Gallic as the British were trying to make the rest of India Britannic' (10). He has been 'made Gallic' in the sense that he has French citizenship, but Pi's parents, who

⁸ An agouti is a Mongolian gerbil; a paca is a large rodent native to Central and South America.

⁹ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 214, 209.

have heard all about Adirubasamy's experiences, are creative in their reception of the francophone influence. Regaled with stories of Parisian swimming pools, they take the name Piscine Molitor out of context to be Pi's name (12). When combined with a second European influence, the English language, this name makes Pi the butt of many jokes; people pronounce it, accidentally or deliberately, as 'pissing'. Pi then makes a borrowing of his own, turning to the Greek π for a nickname to solve this (23). Later, in Canada, Pi's son Nikhil is known as Nick, and his cat, in the novel's only allusion to Native Canadian culture, is called Moccasin (92), but he also maintains his Indian culture: he shows the narrator photographs of 'A Hindu wedding, with Canada prominently on the edges', and himself 'during Diwali on Gerrard Street' (86). Thus, as Ashcroft suggests, the postcolonial 'capacity to adjust global influences to local needs disrupts the simple equation of globalization and Westernization, the idea that globalization is simply a top-down homogenizing pressure'.¹⁰

The juxtaposition of different cultures within India also exposes Pi to various different belief systems. He encounters atheism in Mr Kumar, who says, 'Reason is my prophet and it tells me that as a watch stops, so we die... If the watch doesn't work properly it must be fixed here and now by us'. To dispense with religion, however, is presented as an instance of excessive reason. Pi says, 'I was ... afraid that in a few words thrown out he might destroy something that I loved' (28) (later, the frame narrator, who is sceptical at being told that Pi's story will make him believe, shows signs of developing faith (63)). Pi rejects atheism in favour of not just one but multiple religions: he has been Hindu from birth, and he adopts Christianity and Islam after encounters with a priest and a Muslim baker. Rather than being 'converted' from one religion to another, Pi tries to create a postcolonial patchwork of religions, using the term 'God' to reduce a conflicting multiplicity (the Christian God, Allah, and the many gods of Hinduism besides Krishna or Vishnu) to a monotheistic harmony. All three of his spiritual guides are displeased by this, and there is a debate as his parents and the 'three wise men' try to dissuade him from his multiple faith, but he replies, 'Bapu Gandhi said, "All religions are true"...I just want to love God' (69). Pi wants rules like those of nationality to apply to religious identity too. 'I don't see why I can't be all three. Mamaji [Adirubasamy] has two passports. He's Indian and French' (73). Although this is a contradictory and perhaps impossible endeavour, Pi is responding to his cultural situation in

¹⁰ Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation*, 16.

the way that Ashcroft describes, by interpreting influences in his own way. He maintains this attempt throughout his life; in his Toronto house the frame narrator sees ‘a small framed picture of the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe ... next to it is a framed photo of the black-robed Kaaba, holiest sanctum of Islam. On the television set is a brass statue of Shiva’ (45). Thus, multiple cultural influences are shown to coexist within the postcolonial culture of Pi and his family. While this is not explicitly compared with the cohabitation of animals, inter-cultural and inter-species instances of acceptance are being used to make the same point in opposition to rationalism: openness to difference is preferable to compartmentalisation. More disruptive border crossings, in the form of human and animal displacement, are also presented this way.

In their exploration of human-animal geographies, Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert write that although some animals understand human boundaries, ‘most animals will wander in and out of ... human spatial orderings without knowing that they are doing this’.¹¹ The examples of animal escape in *Life of Pi* tend to involve crossing into (human-defined) human spaces, either from zoos or the wild. The presence of the tiger called Richard Parker in the zoo results from this sort of disruption. A panther has been attacking people in the Khulna district of Bangladesh, but the hunter sent after it instead finds a tiger and her cub: ‘This animal was not the man-eater, but so close to human habitation she might pose a threat to the villagers, especially as she was with cub’ (133). However, Pi attempts to dispel this sort of disquiet at the proximity of animals. He argues that ‘animals don’t escape *to somewhere* but *from something*’, and that ‘Animals that escape go from the known into the unknown – and if there is one thing that an animal hates above all else, it is the unknown. Escaping animals usually hide in the very first place they find’ (41). Consequently, animal proximity to humans is surprisingly common. Prefacing his points by saying ‘I’ll give you hard to believe’ (297), Pi gives the example of a black leopard escaping a zoo in Zurich for ten weeks, and a polar bear which escaped from a zoo in Calcutta and was never seen again, ‘not by police or hunters or poachers or anyone else’ (297). He continues:

If you took the city of Tokyo and turned it upside down and shook it, you would be amazed at the animals that would fall out... Boa constrictors, Komodo dragons,

¹¹ Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, eds. ‘Animal Space, Beastly Places: An Introduction,’ in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 22.

crocodiles, piranhas, ostriches, wolves, lynx, wallabies, manatees, porcupines, orang-utans, wild boar. (42, 297)

These animals are living without regard to human spatial and conceptual boundaries, but they simultaneously contradict the human assumption that this makes them a threat. Pi comments, 'escaped zoo animals are not dangerous absconding criminals but simply wild creatures seeking to fit in' (42). Here, then, Pi displays comfort with and even pleasure in these transgressions of rationalised order and spatial species boundaries.

The attempt by Pi's family to migrate to Canada is presented in a similar way to these zoo animal escapes, emphasising the involuntary nature of some contemporary migrations. As he describes the family's preparations to leave India, Pi likens himself and his brother to zoo animals: 'two animals were being shipped to the Canada Zoo. That's how Ravi and I felt. We did not want to go. We did not want to live in a country of gale-force winds and minus-two-hundred-degree winters' (88). This comparison suggests some awareness of captive animals' lack of control (it might also refer to the removal of zoo animals from their natural climates). For Pi's father, the decision to leave has more in common with the discussion of zoo animals' escapes. Pi says, 'people move in the hope of a better life... because of wear and tear and anxiety ... Because of the feeling that nothing will change, that happiness and prosperity are only possible somewhere else' (77-79). Pi explains that 'In February 1976, the Tamil Nadu government was brought down by Delhi ... it was to Father the crowning touch in Mrs. Gandhi's dictatorial takeover of the nation' (78). Thus, the possible parallels with escaping zoo animals could be seen to liken the Patels *to* animals in their incomplete autonomy. The boys are being moved against their will (initially) as zoo animals are, while their parents are moving only to get away from something, as animals are described as doing.

In the representation of Pondicherry and its zoo, then, *Life of Pi* explores instances of species and cultural juxtaposition, and animal and human escapes, offering potential parallels between human and animal border-crossings and using both to undermine rationalist categories and divisions. Paradoxically, while this might be seen as rejecting a western discourse, the parallels between zoo escapes and the Patels' migration risk being seen to repeat the imperialistic animalisation of non-westerners. However, apart from Mr Kumar's comment that politicians could learn from animals and the likening of Ravi and Pi to transported animals, these potential connections between humans and animals are left implicit,

and are outweighed by a much stronger distinction. Humans' superiority to animals, especially that of Pi and his family, is repeatedly reinforced.

Maintaining boundaries

As discussed in my introduction, Cary Wolfe observes that, because 'much of the work in ... cultural studies and identity politics arose to reassert the social and material ... [status]... of the subject', such discourses often echo the humanist construction of humans as superior to animals.¹² Whether this is the reason for *Life of Pi*'s representation of human-animal relations is questionable, because the exoticising tendencies I noted earlier suggest that the novel does not engage fully with the politics of decolonisation. However, the subordination of nonhuman animals does work to assert the subject status of Pi, his family and his community in India. This first occurs in Pi's discussion of zoos and of human-animal relations within them. The zoo in *Life of Pi* is both an instance of human dominion over animals, and of the legacy of imperialism. Stephen Bostock explains that menageries and zoos often functioned as signifiers of an individual proprietor's wealth and political power, from ancient Greece and Egypt to the Renaissance.¹³ With the spread of global imperialism, collections became status symbols on an international political level, often permitting the public to participate in imperial triumph.¹⁴ *Life of Pi* acknowledges that animal-keeping is associated with power: 'What maharaja's son had such vast, luxuriant grounds to play about? What palace had such a menagerie?' (14). Additionally, the zoo has its origins in Indian politics. 'Pondicherry entered the Union of India on November 1, 1954. One civic achievement called for another. A portion of the grounds of the Pondicherry Botanical Garden was made available rent-free' (12). Pondicherry's membership of the Union of India became possible only when it became independent of French administration, so the founding of Pondicherry's zoo is a celebration of the end of colonial rule and the transfer of power into local hands. However, the signifiers at work are the same as those of an imperial zoo, in that this power is still represented by dominance over animals. In presenting Pi as a zookeeper, the novel thus places him on a par

¹² Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 9.

¹³ Stephen St C. Bostock, *Zoos and Animal Rights: The Ethics of Keeping Animals* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁴ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 209.

with Europeans by constructing his subjectivity in the traditional European way: as distinct from and superior to animals.

Although, as Philo and Wilbert observe, zoos' objectives 'have been precisely to translate wild animals *from* "the wilderness" *to* the special, enclosed and policed enclaves nearer to our human homes in "the city"',¹⁵ humans' conceptual boundaries are unthreatened by this. On the contrary, zoos are presented as advancing humans' intellectual mastery. The zoo in *Life of Pi* is described as 'a cultural institution. Like a public library, like a museum, it is at the service of popular education and science' (78). From the Enlightenment onwards, zoos have often constructed themselves in this way. Harriet Ritvo writes, 'When, as was the case at Regent's Park beginning in 1840, animals were arranged taxonomically, the exhibit showed nature not only confined and restrained, but interpreted and ordered'.¹⁶ The Pondicherry Zoo organises nature in the way that Ritvo describes. Both the plants of the Botanical Garden where the zoo is located, and the zoo animals themselves are labelled (12-13, 25), and the zoo is 'designed and run according to the most modern, biologically sound principles' (12). In these respects, of course, the zoo is imposing a rational order in which animals become physical realisations of 'classificatory schemes wherein each identified thing has its own "proper place" relative to all other things, and can be neatly identified, delimited and positioned in the relevant conceptual space'.¹⁷ Pi's atheist teacher, Mr Kumar, experiences the zoo animals this way:

Each to him was a triumph of logic and mechanics, and nature as a whole was an exceptionally fine illustration of science... When Mr. Kumar visited the zoo, it was to take the pulse of the universe, and his stethoscopic mind always confirmed to him that everything was in order, that everything was order. (26)

By extension, the zoo is also confirming Mr Kumar's rationalist capacity to comprehend the rest of nature, and thus his own position in relation to it, and although Pi does not share Mr Kumar's atheism, he does not oppose his view of the animals. Thus, as in Randy Malamud's description, 'The zoo's forte is its construction of zoogoers as paramount masters of all they

¹⁵ Philo and Wilbert, 'Animal Spaces, Beastly Places', 13.

¹⁶ Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, 218.

¹⁷ Philo and Wilbert, 'Animal Spaces, Beastly Places', 6.

survey, and zoo animals as subalterns'.¹⁸ In *Life of Pi*, this point might be connected to Indian decolonisation: in the context of their municipal zoo, the Indian visitors are not subalterns, and the owners especially are in a clear position of power. The zoo thus twice symbolises the recuperation of non-western autonomy, at the expense of animals and so of what Derrida describes as their conceptual sacrifice.

Indeed, Pi repeatedly tries to defend the practice of keeping animals in zoos. His logic is that because animals are not motivated by a desire for freedom as a concept, and because wild life does not entail such freedom, it is not cruel to keep them in zoos if they are properly looked after. He argues that in the wild, animals are still bound by their particular territorial and environmental needs, which a good zoo can supply more safely (15-17). Thus, Pi's position echoes the European Enlightenment belief that humans can and do know enough, through science, to manipulate and improve upon natural life. Although he believes that 'animals are incapable of such discernment', he claims:

One might even argue that if an animal could choose with intelligence, it would opt for living in a zoo, since the major difference between a zoo and the wild is the absence of parasites and enemies and the abundance of food in the first, and their respective abundance and scarcity in the second. (18)

Zoo commentators often approach this idea more cautiously. For instance, Bostock writes that despite the many advantages of captivity, 'to give the provision of regular food and safety ... as pure and simple advantages of captivity over against life in the wild is to leave out certain related disadvantages...: the loss, in particular, of purposeful living'. He warns that it is important to 'recognise that positive side [to the wild] to realise our responsibility to provide suitably enriched captive conditions'.¹⁹ However, Pi's position is that good zoos do achieve this: 'A biologically sound zoo enclosure ... is just another territory, peculiar only in its size and in its proximity to human territory' (17). Thus, as Armstrong writes, 'Pi's account of the contracted space that typifies the condition of contemporary non-human animals ... makes into virtues ... constriction of movement along with control by, dependence upon, and intimate proximity to, human beings'.²⁰ In claiming that animals would only want to escape

¹⁸ Randy Malamud, *Reading Zoos: Representations Of Animals and Captivity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), 58.

¹⁹ Bostock, *Zoos and Animal Rights*, 71, 72.

²⁰ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 178.

this situation if they were not properly looked after, Pi tries to minimise the extent to which, as Philo and Wilbert put it, zoo escapes ‘suggest a measure of (resistant) agency on the part of animals’.²¹ If animals only escape because, for instance, ‘Something within their territory has frightened them’, then escapes are based only on more passive responses to need.

Of course, Pi’s argument falls down here because keeping animals in zoos involves far too much room for error; zookeepers cannot predict or control everything that might unsettle an animal. Indeed, he himself demonstrates that zoos place animals in a position of vulnerability. Pi says, ‘We commonly say in the trade that the most dangerous animal in a zoo is Man’ (29). The text also includes a rare expression of environmentalism at this point: ‘In a general way we mean how our species’ excessive predatoriness has made the entire planet our prey’ (29). However, the discussion concentrates on zoo visitors, with an implicit distinction from keepers: ‘specifically, we have in mind the people who feed fishhooks to the otters, razors to the bears’ (29). Pi gives examples from ‘the literature’ of animals being fed dangerous objects, and being physically attacked. In his family’s own zoo, incidents of human hostility involve thefts of animals, and ‘stone-throwers, who found the animals too placid and wanted a reaction’ (30). More problems arise from ‘enteritis or gastritis due to too many carbohydrates, especially sugar’ (30). What such points demonstrate, although Pi fails to acknowledge it, is that it is because they are captive, and because the zoo is trying to make money from visitors, that the animals suffer. These points undermine his justification for zoos as safer than the wild. However, Armstrong suggests that while Pi’s claims are easily discredited, ‘These considerations are ignored because Martel is less concerned with the fate of animals than with advancing a particular view of the human condition, which is – despite the novel’s glossy postmodern style – fundamentally that of humanist modernity’.²² Indeed, the discussion immediately following Pi’s description of dangerous zoo-goers reinforces the prevailing anthropocentrism, by presenting threats to humans as more serious than threats to animals.

Pi’s father believes that another animal still more dangerous than humans is ‘*Animalus anthropomorphicus*, the animal as seen through human eyes’ (31). He offers a live goat to a Bengal tiger (Mahisha) as a lesson to his sons, because he suspects them of

²¹ Philo and Wilbert, ‘Animal Spaces, Beastly Places’, 23.

²² Armstrong. *What Animals Mean*, 178.

anthropomorphism. Pi notes, 'I would like to say in my own defence that though I may have anthropomorphized the animals ... the fancy was always conscious... I never deluded myself as to the real nature of my playmates' (34). Elsewhere, he says, 'I am not one given to projecting human traits and emotions onto animals' (4).²³ Tom Tyler explains that anthropomorphism is considered undesirable because it risks 'demeaning humans by failing to appreciate their unique traits', and similarly, 'by focusing on that which the animal shares with the human, we are in danger of missing all that is peculiar and proper to it'.²⁴ Tyler himself concludes that anthropomorphism constitutes an anthropocentric failure of imagination. Pi's father, however, is averse to it for practical anthropocentric reasons; he believes that if his sons forget about differences between humans and other animals, they will be placing themselves in danger. This is clearly presented as more serious than the human threat to animals. On a conceptual level, anthropomorphism also threatens the distinctiveness of the human. Philo and Wilbert write, 'The basic logic to the anthropomorphism critique is that a category mistake is occurring because humans are radically different from animals'. They suggest, 'if the possibility is entertained that humans and animals may *not* be so completely different after all ... then the logical grounding for the charge of anthropomorphism becomes much more rickety'. Their recommendation is

a measured, hesitant and reflected-upon form of anthropomorphism ... which would allow the possibility of insights to be produced from considering *some* non-humans in *some* situations *as if* they could perceive, feel, emote, make decisions and perhaps even 'reason' something like a human being.²⁵

However, this would destabilise concepts of species in which animals are denied many of these abilities, and would probably destabilise institutions like zoos along with them. Therefore, anthropomorphism could undermine the foundations upon which the decolonising Indian characters' subjectivity is constructed and asserted in the novel. Pi's father's anti-

²³ Later, he thoroughly anthropomorphises whales, imagining that they understand his plight, tell each other about him, and try to help him, only to be harpooned by whaling ships (231). He also uses multiple similes with humans to describe the meerkats: they are like 'commuters waiting for a bus', 'children self-consciously posing for a photographer or patients in a doctors office', people 'standing to attention' and people praying in a mosque (266). However, these are perhaps instances of anthropomorphism as conscious fantasy.

²⁴ Tom Tyler. 'If Horses Had Hands...' in *Animal Encounters*, ed. Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 15, 16.

²⁵ Philo and Wilbert, 'Animal Spaces, Beastly Places', 19.

anthropomorphic demonstration instead confirms for Pi that ‘an animal is an animal, essentially and practically removed from us’ (31).

In relation to the politics of zookeeping, then, the novel maintains traditional distinctions and power structures. Because *Life of Pi* never overtly explores questions of identity politics, one can only speculate as to the reasons for this ideological humanism. The insistence on human supremacy in Pondicherry Zoo could be intended to assert not merely human subject status in general, but specifically Indian subject status during a period of liberation from colonial rule. Certainly its effect is that subjectivity is not destabilised but rather remains available for and is accorded to decolonising India. However, the effect for animals is that although some get out of their cages in a literal sense, and the fascination with them arguably fosters their appeal for humans, they remain within the bounds of a conceptual zoo of which Pi is always the keeper. This retention of humanist ideology despite the opposition to rationalism continues to inform the narrative even as it moves outside the zoo in Parts II and III, in an exploration of storytelling that is increasingly surprising, yet strongly reinforces humanist species distinctions.

A survival story

During the Patels’ voyage across the Pacific towards Canada, their ship, the *Tsimtsum*, suddenly sinks and Pi is left to drift on a lifeboat for 227 days until he reaches Mexico. The theme of survival can be read as a mark of the novel’s Canadian provenance. Atwood has argued that survival is a central theme or symbol for Canada, and lists three types: bare survival, grim survival (after a crisis or disaster) and spiritual survival, ‘as anything more than a minimally human being’. She suggests that the Canadian sense of being out of place is one reason for the importance of this theme. ‘Canada is an unknown territory for the people who live in it, and ... I’m talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head’.²⁶ This impression is not limited to Canada. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write, ‘A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement... with the development or recovery of an effective identifying

²⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), 33, 32, 18.

relationship between self and place'.²⁷ Indeed, survival in the context of displacement is also a significant theme within each of the texts under discussion here. *Life of Pi* perhaps presents the concept most literally, however, in that Pi is actually lost, and of course quite out of his element on the sea. Pi's survival is also the vehicle for the novel's central anti-rationalist theme of what it terms 'the better story'. Although reason is presented as necessary to survival, so is imagination. Pi says,

I applied my reason at every moment. Reason is excellent for getting food, clothing and shelter. Reason is the very best tool kit. Nothing beats reason for keeping tigers away. But be excessively reasonable and you risk throwing out the universe with the bathwater. (298)

The novel does not seek to dispense with reason altogether, then, but to foster openness to surprise, where, for instance, Mr Kumar's atheist rationalism does not. The account of the voyage that Pi tells to the frame narrator borders on magic realism: not only is Pi's survival remarkable, so are his experiences, especially in relation to animals. However, as is the case in relation to zookeeping, the concept of human superiority is also maintained, apparently for the sake of two of the types of survival described by Atwood: bare (physical) survival and spiritual survival (as more than a minimally human being).

Life of Pi's first survival story contains many details which are not impossible, but which are very unlikely. The first example of this is the presence of zoo animals in the lifeboat. Pi describes being thrown into a boat which already contains a hyena, because, he surmises, the crew is trying to use him as fodder. A zebra then either jumps or is thrown into the lifeboat too, Richard Parker is rescued by Pi (who throws him a life ring before he realises the danger to himself), and Orange Juice the orang-utan arrives floating on a raft of bananas. Over the next few days, she and the zebra are killed by the hyena, which is in turn killed by Richard Parker. The presence of these animals, especially Richard Parker, who survives alongside Pi until they reach Mexico, is so improbable that it must be omitted from the second, believable story that Pi later tells for the interviewers. Natural phenomena are also presented as remarkable, and Pi obviously derives spiritual sustenance from them, in relation to his Hinduism, Christianity and Islamism. He observes in Richard Parker, during a hail of

²⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989), 8.

flying fish, 'a mix of ease and concentration, such a being-in-the-present' as 'would be the envy of the highest yogis' (182). He finds peace watching the sea life on the underside of his raft (built to put him out of reach of Richard Parker): 'What I saw was an upside-down town, small, quiet and peaceable, whose citizens went about with the sweet civility of angels. The sight was a welcome relief for my frayed nerves' (198). An electrical storm is 'something to pull me out of my limited mortal ways and thrust me into a state of wonder', and he praises Allah, saying to Richard Parker 'Stop your trembling! This is miracle. This is an outbreak of divinity' (233). Pi's remarkable experiences are not always uplifting; his meeting with another castaway is quite the reverse. This encounter has a dreamlike quality, because Pi and Richard Parker are both temporarily blind from malnutrition, and when he hears a man's voice, Pi thinks that he is hallucinating. He first believes that he is talking to himself, and then to Richard Parker, before realising that the voice in fact belongs to a Frenchman who is confessing to cannibalism. When he threatens Pi, Richard Parker kills him and this facilitates Pi's own cannibalism: 'driven by the extremity of my need and the madness to which it pushed me, I ate some of his flesh... You must understand, my suffering was unremitting and he was already dead' (256). This is detrimental to Pi's morale even before he eats the flesh. When Richard Parker kills the man, 'Something in me died ... that has never come back to life' (255). Yet compared with the alternative strictly rationalist story, in which Pi is the killer and cannibalism is direct and brutal, the presentation of human death as if dreamed and cannibalism as accidental maintains his ability to cope.

However, although Pi's morale is supported by uplifting natural phenomena and the dreamlike gloss over cannibalism, his spiritual survival as more than minimally human is also presented as dependent on his ability to transcend his physical conditions. In this respect, the danger is that the exigencies of physical survival, specifically in terms of consumption, might render him uncivilised and *less* than human. Most obviously, Pi has no choice but to kill other animals, and here he faces both spiritual as well as practical obstacles. He begins for his own safety by catching fish to feed to Richard Parker, and although he is not eating them himself yet, he feels guilt: 'A lifetime of peaceful vegetarianism stood between me and the willful beheading of a fish' (183). Despite the fact that this vegetarianism presumably originates from his Hinduism, and despite having just lost his real brother, Ravi, Pi describes this in terms of biblical fratricide: 'I wept heartily over this poor little deceased soul... I was now a

killer. I was now as guilty as Cain' (183). This reference implies that Pi might see nonhuman animals as beings not dissimilar from himself, whom he must not kill.²⁸ However, he adapts readily: 'the explanation ... is simple and brutal: a person can get used to anything, even to killing' (185). The image of human-animal equality is thus rapidly replaced by one of mastery. 'It was with a hunter's pride that I pulled the raft up to the lifeboat' (185). 'With time and experience I became a better hunter' (195). As Armstrong observes, Pi 'even establishes his control over nature ... by 'farming', albeit for water,' with his solar stills.²⁹ Pi refers to one as 'My sweet sea cow' (187) and comments, 'these technological contraptions became as precious to me as cattle are to a farmer. Indeed, as they floated placidly in an arc, they looked almost like cows grazing in a field. I ministered to their needs' (188). Pi sees his killing and consuming of animals, however, as threatening to blur the distinction between humans and other species. 'I descended to a level of savagery I never imagined possible' (197). He realises, 'I ate like an animal ... this noisy, frantic, unchewing wolfing-down of mine was exactly the way Richard Parker ate' (225). This is a good example of Boria Sax's observation that, 'In a very visceral way, people have always been inclined to judge types of animals by the things and manner in which they eat'.³⁰ The comparison between Pi and Richard Parker is a judgement in the same terms of savagery and refinement. The dangers of this failure of distinction are especially significant in the context of decolonisation, a point emphasised in the novel when, in an Indian restaurant in Canada, a waiter sees Pi eating with his fingers and says 'Fresh off the boat are you?' (7). Pi has literally just come off the boat, but the expression means inexperienced and unsophisticated. The recovery of refinement is therefore important to the assertion not only of Pi's humanity but his civilised status. These qualities are further threatened by his eating of human flesh. Sax's point about consumption also applies to people and what they eat. Cannibalism, traditionally regarded as the most extreme example of savagery, represents the lowest point in Pi's struggle to survive spiritually. The description of the act represents it as a failure on Pi's part to maintain boundaries. What he eats are 'strips [of flesh] that I meant for the gaff's hook that, when dried in the sun, looked like ordinary animal flesh' (256). Thus, Pi's cannibalism results from

²⁸ Pi might also be seen as connected to fish in that his name, Piscine, though inspired by a swimming pool, is also an adjective meaning 'pertaining to fish'.

²⁹ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 178.

³⁰ Boria Sax, cited in Malamud, *Reading Zoos*, 231.

a blurring of the proper distinction between a human and an 'ordinary animal'. It may be in an attempt to recover this distinction that Pi 'pray[s] for his soul every day' (256).

The threat to Pi's status as the human of humanism is also combated by his responses to Richard Parker. The domination of the tiger is the chief means by which human superiority is maintained in the face of the animalised and cannibalistic acts that are part of Pi's efforts to survive physically. Concluding that he has no way to kill him, Pi's first idea is simply to keep Richard Parker well fed and to remain out of reach on a raft attached to the boat. This changes when Richard Parker indicates that he means no harm. 'He was simply taking me in, observing me, in a manner that was sober but not menacing... He made a sound, a snort from his nostrils... He did it a second time. I was astonished. *Prusten?*' (162-63). Pi explains, 'Prusten is the quietest of tiger calls, a puff through the nose to express friendliness and harmless intentions' (163-64). Ironically, given his interpretation of Richard Parker's meaning, this leads Pi to decide, 'I had to tame him. It was at that moment that I realised this necessity. It was not a question of him or me, but of him *and* me. We were, literally and figuratively, in the same boat' (164). Armstrong suggests that Pi's conclusion here 'encapsulates a dominant environmentalist structure of feeling, according to which the crucial factor in safeguarding the continuation of life in general is the preservation of inter-relationships between species,' and that the lifeboat provides 'an allegory of biodiversity; environmentally speaking, humans and animals are "in the same boat"'. Similarly, Pi's expression might be interpreted as approaching what I am calling species posthumanism, if it means that he and a nonhuman animal are regarded as being in an equal position. However, as Armstrong puts it, 'the environmentalist veneer of *Life of Pi* proves rather thin'.³¹ In terms of Richard Parker, although Pi's decision to tame him is expressed in terms of shared survival, the result does not echo the tiger's friendly 'prusten'. Instead, it is an ongoing assertion of mastery. For one thing, Pi very clearly regards himself as continuing to occupy the position of keeper, while Richard Parker remains a zoo animal. 'It occurred to me that with every passing day the lifeboat was resembling a zoo enclosure more and more: Richard Parker had his sheltered area for sleeping and resting, his food stash and now his watering hole' (188-89). Indeed, as in the zoo, Richard Parker is dependent on Pi for physical survival because humans have removed him even further from his natural habitat: Pi observes,

³¹ Armstrong, *Knowing Animals*, 177.

I was the source of food and water... when he looked beyond the gunnel, he saw no jungle that he could hunt in and no river from which he could drink freely... My agency was pure and miraculous. It conferred power on me.' (223)

In addition to this zookeeping, Pi imagines himself as a ringmaster in relation to Richard Parker, shouting out an announcement of 'the Pi Patel, Indo-Canadian, trans-Pacific floating circuuuuuassssssssss!!!' (165). As a substitute for physical barriers, Pi imposes psychological ones. He trains Richard Parker by provoking and then punishing him, rocking the boat to make him seasick and blowing on his whistle until the tiger responds to the sound alone (203-05). When Richard Parker backs down before his stare, he says, 'I felt my mastery was no longer in question' (222).³² What most aligns Pi with the role of trainer, then, is his attitude.

Finally, both the counter-rational and uplifting qualities of nature and the assertion of Pi's more than minimally human being are reiterated in concentrated form in relation to a floating island. This island is so extraordinary as to approach magic realism.³³ This genre is defined by Wendy B. Faris as combining 'realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed'.³⁴ Within Pi's first story, the discovery of the floating island is conveyed in typical magic realist terms; it is the seemingly impossible made real through realistic detail. Although at first sight, Pi is 'certain it was an

³² In fact, Pi is also careful of Richard Parker's boundaries, observing that 'Richard Parker's territorial claims seemed to be limited to the floor of the boat' (171), and with his own urine, Pi only reinforces the tiger's spatial division, by 'animal' means

³³ Martel's use of magic realist elements in *Life of Pi* might be seen by some as appropriative of a decolonising literary technique. Stephen Slemon writes that magic realism in literature is perceived as carrying 'a residuum of resistance towards the imperial center and its totalizing systems of generic classification'. He suggests, 'This structure of perception ... is a controversial one ... as mainstream writers find a ready market for the recirculation of what the imperial center takes to comprise the "characteristic" literary and cultural forms of formerly colonized cultures'. Thus, a white writer like Martel might be perceived to capitalise on a notion of literary exotic in using magic realism, and he does arguably use the genre in the stereotypical way that Slemon describes in making it a feature of his (arguably 'mainstream') rejection of rationalism. However, as Slemon notes, magic realism already features within Canadian literature, which means that Martel is not instigating the appropriation if this constitutes one. Additionally, white postcolonial borrowings from a decolonising culture need not be read as exploitative; an alternative interpretation is that, as William Riggan argues, Canadian literature is diversifying with the emergence of recent immigrant authors and becoming 'a truly multicultural ... entity'. Stephen Slemon, 'Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 408. William Riggan, 'Of Obstacles, Survival, and Identity: On Contemporary Canadian Literature.' *World Literature Today* 73, no. 2 (1999): 230.

³⁴ Wendy B. Faris. 'Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction.' In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 163.

illusion' (256), he is convinced by a more animal sense: 'it was my nose that was the judge of land. It came to my olfactory sense, full and fresh, overwhelming: the smell of vegetation... It was then that I believed' (258). The island is made of edible algae and is populated with meerkats, 'a subspecies that had specialised in a fascinating and surprising way' (267), living on dead saltwater fish dragged from the island's pools. Pi guesses that these pools are open to the sea beneath the island, and that in fact it is a floating mass of algae which desalinates the water. In this way, the island is presented as explicable, and thus as growing out of reality, but is sufficiently astonishing that it illustrates the limitations of a strictly rationalist perspective.

However, the theoretical nature of the novel's anti-humanism is again in evidence here, for magic realist details are simultaneously used for otherwise humanist ends. In terms of human-animal relations, the island provides an opportunity to test and confirm the extent of Pi's domination of Richard Parker. Because he has a plentiful supply of fresh water and meerkat meat, Richard Parker not only returns to health, he is free of the previous dependence that conferred power on Pi. Pi worries: '[h]e might become relaxed and confident, less open to my influence' (273). However, Pi successfully renews his efforts to dominate Richard Parker, literally making him jump through hoops for half a meerkat each (a particularly remarkable feat of training given the proximity of the meerkat colony) (274). There can be no practical reason for the use of hoops in particular; they are simply an artefact of the circus epitomising the concept of human mastery. In this way, Pi's human ascendancy is retained even outside the lifeboat despite Richard Parker's comparative freedom. Indeed, Pi's initial experience of the island can be interpreted as a microcosmic example of an anthropocentric view of life: everything seems designed to meet his needs:

What reason could I have to leave the island? Were my physical needs not met here?

...More algae than I could eat, and when I yearned for variety, more meerkats and fish than I could ever desire? ...did I not have these delightful meerkats to keep me

company? And wasn't Richard Parker still in need of improving his fourth jump? (279)

There is no longer any question here of whether it is acceptable to eat not only fish that he does not have to kill, but also meerkats whom he regards as companions: such animals are now presented as resources, while Richard Parker is no longer a threat. Despite its challenge to realism and so to rationalism, then, the magic realism of the island so far works to reinforce other humanist notions of humans' privileged position in relation to the rest of nature.

This situation lasts until Pi makes another surprising discovery that suddenly undermines the stability of the discourses that the island first appears to support. After finding human teeth wrapped in the trees' foliage (280), Pi experiments with a meerkat and then his own feet to confirm his fear that the island's algae becomes acidic at night. Pi is very upset by this. Of course, the carnivorous island is dangerous, but so is the sea, and so is Richard Parker, who Pi takes with him when he escapes the island. Thus, Pi's departure does not seem motivated by fear. Partly, he feels betrayed: 'The radiant promise it offered during the day was replaced in my heart by all the treachery it delivered at night' (282). However, his decision is phrased as preferring 'to set off and perish in search of my own kind than to live a lonely half-life of physical comfort and spiritual death on this murderous island' (282-83). Until now, he has not been worried about solitude, so the concept of spiritual death must refer to something else. He does not explain, but one possibility is that the island's carnivorousness is a reminder of his own cannibalistic act, which threatens his sense of his own humanity. Alternatively or additionally, he may be disturbed by the idea that the island's predatory nature challenges his supremacy in a way that he cannot overcome. Unlike Richard Parker, over whom Pi has repeatedly asserted his power, the island cannot be subdued with 'taming'. On the contrary, he would remain dependent on island to meet his needs in the way that a zoo animal is dependent on him.

The first story of Pi's survival, then, can be described as a version of theoretical anti-humanism. Its remarkable and magic realist elements continue the opposition to abstract rationalism, which I am reading as humanist. However, the notion of human exceptionality is maintained as ideology necessary to survival. For Pi, this is true not only because he needs to kill animals to sustain Richard Parker and himself, but also because eating like an animal and engaging in cannibalism challenge his sense of his own human status, which he reasserts via mastery over animals. The risks of inverting the dynamics of his first story and viewing his journey more 'realistically', but without opportunities for maintaining the ideology of human mastery, are underscored when Pi's interviewers request an alternative account.

A story without animals

In an interview taped while Pi is recovering in Mexico, Mr Okamoto and Mr Chiba, the representatives of the Japanese Maritime Department, come to interview him to try to find out

why the ship sank. These two men are simultaneously characters in the novel and, like the frame narrator, another audience sitting between Pi and the reader. They function as intermediary ‘readers’ of Pi’s stories; their analysis of what he says effectively directs the interpretation of the novel as a whole and encourages the reader to choose the first story over the second. This is underscored in the ‘Author’s note’ at the novel’s outset, where the frame narrator writes, ‘It was as I listened to that tape that I agreed with Mr. Adirubasamy that this was, indeed, a story to make you believe in God’ (xiii). In other words, it is when taken in conjunction with the interviewers’ disbelief that Pi’s story has the power to convert.

Pi begins by telling them the same story which, more than twenty years later, he tells to the frame narrator in Toronto. Okamoto and Chiba react as if Pi has tried to deceive them; Chiba comments in Japanese, ‘He thinks we’re fools’ (282). The ensuing debate underscores the novel’s theme of belief. Okamoto and Chiba’s first objection is easily answered: they assert that bananas don’t float (in Pi’s story, Orange Juice the orang-utan reaches the lifeboat on a raft of bananas), whereupon Pi produces some and they do. However, other aspects of Pi’s story are less readily proven. Okamoto says, ‘Carnivorous trees? A fish-eating algae that produces fresh water? Tree-dwelling aquatic rodents? These things don’t exist... Your island is botanically impossible’ (294). They also question the existence of Richard Parker, as there has been no evidence of his presence in Mexico. Pi then begins to argue with Okamoto and Chiba about the nature of credibility. He refers to various scientific discoveries which proved the apparently impossible, and Chiba’s reference to bonsai trees, which Pi claims never to have heard of, helps to make his point. He asks, ‘If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for? ... What is your problem with hard to believe?’ This is when Pi warns that excessive reason risks ‘throwing out the universe with the bathwater’ (297-98). The point that Pi is making here is lost on Okamoto and Chiba; the latter misses the metaphor – ‘Why is he talking about bathwater?’ – thereby illustrating that it is indeed limiting to perceive only through the faculty of reason. This is then iterated through an illustration of what happens to a story when rationalism is imposed upon it.

The interviewers’ preoccupation with the cause of the sinking of the ship, a detail which seems incongruously insignificant after Pi’s ordeal, eventually forces Pi to conclude that what

is being asked for is ‘a story that won’t surprise you ... a story without animals’ (302-03).³⁵ The result threatens Pi’s spiritual survival because the details that made it possible – the animals, the hallucinatory presentation of Pi’s encounter with the Frenchman, and the ‘magical’ floating island – are all absent. Of these, the lack of animals is the most significant. Instead of the tiger, hyena, zebra and orang-utan, the others in the lifeboat with Pi are a French cook, a Taiwanese sailor and Pi’s mother. The cook cuts off the sailor’s broken leg to use for bait, and when the sailor dies, he cannibalises the body. He then kills Pi’s mother, and Pi fights, kills and eats him. This story is violent in its brevity as well as its content. Very little of Pi’s time in the lifeboat is accounted for, and details like the awe-inspiring storms, the island, and the presence of a Bengal tiger, all of which served to temper the harshness of survival in the first story, are entirely absent. Thus, the imposition of strictly rational criteria on Pi’s narrative results, as Okamoto and Chiba acknowledge, in a ‘horrible story’ (311), in which he is reduced to physical survival only, and to the ‘spiritual death’ which he associates with the island once he realises it is carnivorous.

Moreover, without Richard Parker, human subjectivity comes into question in a way that, I suggest, iterates the central role of animals in the construction of the humanist subject. As performed by animals, the actions of the hyena and Richard Parker are largely unproblematic; both kill because they need to eat. When, unable to see the man in the boat, Pi thinks that he is conversing with Richard Parker, he is critical of the consumption of human flesh. The speaker says that he killed from need, and ‘It was them or me’ (247), and Pi replies, ‘The need of a monster... expressed in all its amoral simplicity... Instinct ... the very definition of an animal, that’s all you are’ (247). Yet need, self-defence and instinct would all normally be acceptable justification for a tiger’s actions. In *Brutal Reasoning*, Erica Fudge observes that according to humanist thought, ‘animals never had reason to abandon in the first place. Because of this, animals cannot be vicious’.³⁶ Pi’s implication is that humans would

³⁵ Their imposition might also be seen as problematic because it echoes the way colonised peoples’ own stories have repeatedly been presented as mythological or superstitious, and discounted in favour of supposedly objective accounts. If it is intended this way, Martel’s use of Japanese interviewers is appropriate; though it was on a small scale compared with British colonialism, the Japanese briefly invaded and occupied India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands during the Second World War. See for instance Jayant Dasgupta, *Japanese in Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Red Sun over Black Water* (New Delhi: Manas, 2002); Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

³⁶ Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 66.

not act in the same way, but then he learns that he is speaking to a man who has committed cannibalism, and then does so himself. In this first story, though, only Pi is guilty of cannibalism, and he does not kill the man but only eats his flesh, opportunistically, when it is unrecognisably human. As is underscored for the reader via Okamoto and Chiba's observations, the roles played by animals in the first story are played by humans in the second. Okamoto says, 'The Taiwanese sailor is the zebra, his mother is the orang-utan, the cook is ... the hyena – which means he's the tiger!' (311).³⁷ As performed by humans, their actions are more open to condemnation.

There are two possible moral interpretations of the second story. One is that the problem of morality comes into play where it did not in relation to animals. According to this view, humans have reason and morality to abandon, so Pi is guilty of murder where Richard Parker is not, and the French cook is guilty of both murder and cannibalism where the hyena is not. As humans, they are also answerable for their actions. Fudge writes that according to Aristotelean philosophy, 'humans can fail to *be* human. They have the essence, but they do not always use it, and this failure makes them worse than the beings they have become'.³⁸ If similar logic is applied here, the decolonizing subject status which Pi achieves in the first story through his mastery of animals disappears, and he becomes *less* than animal, like the savage cannibals in *Robinson Crusoe* who are presented as worse than lions and tigers. Alternatively, castaway cannibalism might be justified on the grounds of need. This point was taken into consideration in the 1884 case of Dudley and Stephens who cannibalised their cabin boy, a real Richard Parker. Although they were sentenced to death on the grounds of murder, they were, in Lord Coleridge's words, 'recommended most earnestly to the mercy of the Crown', and were in fact released after six months' imprisonment.³⁹ In *Life of Pi*, the justification of need is not applicable to the French cook's actions because he chooses cannibalism over rationing out the lifeboat's supplies. It might be applicable to Pi's. The cook has already killed everyone else in the boat, so he has reason to suppose that he will be next. Therefore, Pi might not be worse than an animal after all. However, he would in this story still be reduced to instinct and need, and thus, in his own terms, no more than an animal. This

³⁷ This view of use of an animal to externalise an aspect of the human recalls Martel's inclusion of a dog in his previous novel, *Self*: while the gender-changing protagonist is a woman, she has a dog whom she sees as so much resembling male genitalia that she calls him Figleaf. Yann Martel, *Self* (London: Faber, 1996)

³⁸ Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 48.

³⁹ Hanson, *The Custom of the Sea*, 427-28.

point is obviously underscored by the idea that Richard Parker *is* Pi, or part of him. Various other details from Pi's first story support this interpretation. For instance, when Richard Parker kills the French castaway, Pi comments, 'This was the terrible cost of Richard Parker. He gave me a life, my own, but at the expense of taking one' (255). In Mexico, he says that the tiger is 'hiding somewhere you'll never find him' (317). Thus, again as in Aristotelean thought, 'The logical description of [the] absence of evidence of reason is a descent to the animal, is the revelation of the "beast in man"'.⁴⁰ Pi cannot separate himself from or dominate this part of himself as he can a tiger, so it consumes him where the tiger does not; Pi says that the French cook 'met evil in me – selfishness, anger, ruthlessness. I must live with that' (311). The anti-anthropomorphic lesson that animals are removed from humans is thus thoroughly undermined. Pi's subjectivity becomes fragmented and conflicted, and his human morality becomes blurred by animality. Uncontested by animals or other remarkable phenomena, rationalism reduces Pi to physical survival only, and undermines the subjectivity that is maintained by human-animal distinctions in the first story. This effect is counteracted, however, by the reinstatement of animals through the novel's valuation of one story over the other.

Within the context of magic realism, a genre which arguably informs the presentation of the island, it is common for two stories to exist in tension with one another. Slemon writes,

Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other,' a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences and silences. (409)

The effect of this is that, as Faris writes, 'The reader may hesitate (at one point or another) between two contradictory understandings of events – and hence experiences some unsettling doubts'.⁴¹ In *Life of Pi*, Okamoto and Chiba, as Pi's audience, are faced with this problem. Okamoto recognises the parallels between the animals and the human characters, but there are still gaps; the parallels do not fully explain the original story. Chiba asks, 'But what does it mean ... what about the island? Who are the meerkats? ... Whose teeth were those in the tree?' (311-12). Thus, the first story is not so easily eliminated by the imposition of

⁴⁰ Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 60.

⁴¹ Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', 171.

rationalism and the interviewers are more confounded than before. However, whereas, Slemon observes, ‘the characteristic maneuver of magic realist fiction is that its two separate narrative modes never manage to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy’,⁴² Martel imposes one. At the outset of the novel, the frame narrator comments, ‘That’s what fiction is about, isn’t it, the selective transforming of reality? The twisting of it to bring out its essence?’ (x). Then at the end of his first story, disappointed that Richard Parker has left without a farewell glance, Pi says, ‘I am a person who believes in form, in the harmony of order. Where we can, we must give things a meaningful shape’ (285). This desire for ‘order’ implies that despite his theoretical rejection of rationalism, Pi may want to retain this too on an ideological level, together with the notions of essence and meaning. These, indeed, are ideologies that arguably inform both Pi’s first story and the novel as a whole. The essence or meaningful shape is drawn out when, after telling the Japanese interviewers both stories, Pi asks them, and implicitly the reader, to choose which is better. Since neither one explains the sinking of the *Tsimtsum*, and neither can be proven, they agree that it is the story with animals. In their final report, they conclude by observing that Pi’s is an astounding story, as ‘Very few castaways can claim to have survived so long at sea ... and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger’ (319). If Richard Parker is admitted by the interviewers to exist as a tiger after all, the rationalism with which they have tried to ‘colonise’ Pi’s story has been argued away to even their satisfaction. Paradoxically, this means that the ideology of stable human subjectivity, as demonstrated by the mastery of animals, remains available for and accessible to Pi. In this way, animals appear essential to the conception of the coherent, autonomous subject that the novel seeks to retain. Thus, the question of animals is symbolically ‘sacrificed’ not just *to* the humanist concept of the human but *in order to* maintain it at all.

Conclusion

In *Life of Pi*, then, the presence of animals is essential to what I am calling theoretical anti-humanism. Their crossing of physical boundaries and their role as a source of surprise and optimism help disrupt the notion of strict rationalism that the novel opposes. More importantly, however, Pi’s humanity is also defined through distinctions with and mastery of Richard Parker’s animality in particular, thus permitting the retention and assertion of aspects

⁴² Slemon, ‘Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse’, 410.

of humanist ideology that the novel treats as necessary. In Pi's second story, unopposed rationalism reduces Pi from spiritual to bare survival. The suggestion that the frightening and predatory tiger and hyena might be facets of humanity fragments subjectivity and might not only bring humans down to the level of animals, it might make them lower if they are seen as failing to exercise the morality available to them. If the novel were to accept this story, it could put Pi into the position of *Disgrace*'s Lurie, who slowly abandons his view of humans as a separate order of being from other species. However, the overriding preference for a story with animals, at face value so like Lurie's idea of including a dog in his opera, in fact closes this possibility down, by using them to support Pi's status as a human subject. The result is that the novel's presentation of animals is itself like that of a zoo; they are the objects of fascination, but they remain essentially and practically removed from us, as Pi's father puts it (31), by conceptual boundaries which are, if anything, reinforced. Thus, the novel does not attempt to address species concerns in alliance with its other preoccupations: animals facilitate the novel's disruption of rationalism, but that disruption does not in turn facilitate any interrogation of species relations as they are constructed within humanist discourse.

* * * * *

The examination of *Disgrace* and *Life of Pi* offered in this first section opens up ideas that run through the remainder of the thesis. Together, the novels illustrate the potential range of approaches to human-animal relations and to challenging humanism within the context of recent white postcolonial literature, and show how other cultural and thematic preoccupations shape the engagement with these ideas. The next section continues to work toward offering some picture of white postcolonial cultures' understandings of their relation to animals, but adopts a specifically temporal focus, in order to explore how the remaining novels' attention to history informs the treatment of species relations and humanism. The three novels addressed in this section, Fiona Farrell's *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* (2007), Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* (1999) and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), are set in the past, present and future respectively. They oppose humanist notions of species relations and history and explore posthumanist alternatives, although none embraces such ideas unreservedly. *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* offers a fictionalised story of the introduction of mustelids to New Zealand

in the 1880s, making use of retrospective irony to expose the arrogance of Enlightenment humanism, and exposing the limits to their power to shape history through the mastery of nature by showing that in fact, humans are subject *to* nature. However, in implying that the present should learn from this, the novel leaves room for the idea that contemporary humans could still shape the future of human-animal relations more positively. *The Hunter* is less optimistic about this point. Leigh presents a protagonist who is comfortable with a view of humans as producing history through their destructiveness, and she sets technological posthumanism against species posthumanism in such a way that the historical extinction of thylacines is effectively replayed in the present. Finally, *Oryx and Crake* appears thoroughly to undermine the Enlightenment view of history as progress, painting a dystopian picture of the future in which both species and postcolonial concerns are subordinated to a hegemonic scientific regime. Although humans are presented as significantly, and in one case very deliberately shaping history, Atwood, like Farrell, also emphasises that humans are not the only influence on the history of life on earth.

SECTION TWO

3. Subject to nature: retrospect in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*

In this second section of my thesis, as I have indicated, my evaluation of white postcolonial representations of animals addresses explicit engagements with history, past, present and future. Beginning chronologically, then, with the past, this chapter investigates how a white postcolonial culture's problematic relationship with its heritage can inform its understanding of human-animal relations. This chapter's discussion concentrates on Fiona Farrell's *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* (2007), a novel which retells a late nineteenth-century shipment of mustelids to New Zealand, where they were intended to control the imported rabbit population but instead preyed largely on native birds.¹ Postcolonial and species concerns connect in two ways in this text. The representation of human-animal relations underscores that colonialism included not just the colonisation of humans (something which Farrell scarcely addresses) but also the colonisation of animals; that is, the settlement of New Zealand resulted in the arrival of European animals as well as humans, which proceeded to displace and to exterminate native species. In that sense, the novel can be read as an acknowledgement of the colonial impact on native animals, and even as extending the phenomenon of colonial guilt to encompass human-animal relations. However, the destructive actions of the introduced animals, in this case mustelids, are also important because they were unexpected, at least by those humans who introduced them: whether or not they were worried about the native birds, they were still expecting mustelids to prey on the troublesome rabbits to a much greater extent than they did. This is presented within the novel as a lesson. It creates irony at the expense of the colonial characters who believe themselves capable of mastering nature, which functions as a warning to the present to avoid the same arrogance. Thus, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, like *Life of Pi*, presents animals' own actions as contributing to the contradiction of humanist rationalism, and like *Disgrace*, it opposes Eurocentrism and the privileging of the human species as well.

¹ Fiona Farrell, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* (Auckland: Vintage, 2007).

As Linda Hutcheon explains, white postcolonial cultures may feel colonised or under threat from globalisation, yet their history always ‘means descent from colonisers or settlers’.² This means that while periods of colonialism and settlement are defining ones for postcolonialism, the contemporary descendants of settlers may also feel a certain distance from aspects of this past. In New Zealand, European settlement began in earnest in the nineteenth century. As the European colony established itself, it had an increasing impact on Maori culture and on the environment. Historian Michael King explains that as a result of gold rushes and provincial and central government schemes, the Pakeha (European New Zealander) population increased from just over 300 in 1830 to around 500,000 in 1881. He writes, ‘Those who had to relinquish ground, literally and metaphorically ... were the ... indigenous Maori. And, in relinquishing ground, they would lose it’. That ground was then to be dramatically altered. King observes that while Maori had introduced rats, dogs, and perhaps pigs and chickens to New Zealand, Europeans brought many more species, reshaping the landscape ‘to remind settlers of their lands of origin and to enable them to generate livelihoods from the kinds of extractive or agricultural activities with which they were familiar’. He later describes this as ‘intense colonisation of the flora and fauna’.³ For some Pakeha, such points result in the kind of discomfort with colonial heritage that Hutcheon describes. In *Maoriland*, Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, examining the little-known New Zealand writing from between 1872 and 1914, explain that literature from this period is significant because ‘it is not only part of New Zealand history but a formative part; because that which embarrasses us usually tells us something important about ourselves we do not wish to own’.⁴ *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* revisits this period, but it does not engage with Pakeha-Maori relations in any depth. The narrative’s only reference to a non-European culture is one character’s memory of seeing picture-box images of a girl ‘from one of them islands’ removing her clothes, which leads to false expectations of New Zealand (117-18). Any explanation for this almost complete absence can only be speculative, but Stafford and Williams’ point about contemporary embarrassment could

² Linda Hutcheon, *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 72.

³ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), 169, 178, 24, 194.

⁴ Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872-1914* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), 14.

be one. Alternatively, Farrell's approach may constitute a recognition, not unlike Coetzee's caution about telling the stories of others, that colonial history is controversial because questions of what constitutes it and how it is to be interpreted are often seen as contingent upon who records history and who it records. Perhaps this explanation is more likely, since the false impressions created by the picture-box draw attention to the problem of misrepresentation, while Farrell shows a willingness to engage with other embarrassing aspects of European colonisation and indeed, to present her colonial settler characters with considerable irony.

Hutcheon suggests in *Splitting Images* that irony is valuable for white Canada as a way of 'pretending to speak a dominant "language" while subverting it at the same time'.⁵ New Zealand critic Lydia Wevers has shown how history itself can be a simultaneously spoken and subverted 'language' within postcolonial literature, observing that although the 'recognition that history is a contemporary political issue' is not new in New Zealand fiction, it is currently informed by 'a postmodern willingness to ironize and negativize discourse'. Recent postcolonial historical novels, she writes,

re-present historical events, reinforcing the effects poststructuralism and deconstruction have had on history as a discipline, while reaffirming a postcolonial desire for origin, for location, a recognition that even a shameful history is a shared history, even the history of colonial oppression lends itself to a confirmation of common cause, a claim on a shared identity.⁶

One of Wevers' examples is Peter Hawes' *Tasman's Lay*, in which a Balinese translator on Abel Tasman's ship gives an alternative version of events which contradicts historical records.⁷ Wevers writes,

The novel's postmodern strategies draw attention to the fiction of fiction as well as the fiction of history, but *Tasman's Lay* also maps the chaotic messiness of human affairs and pushes past history's tidy retrospective horizons into new worlds of possibility.⁸

⁵ Hutcheon, *Splitting Images*, vii.

⁶ Lydia Wevers, 'The Fact of the Matter: History, Narrative and Record in *The Singing Whakapapa* and *Tasman's Lay*,' *The Literary Criterion* 33, 1 (1998): 47.

⁷ Peter Hawes, *Tasman's Lay* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1995).

⁸ Wevers, 'The Fact of the Matter', 56.

Part of the point of this subversion of traditional accounts is to emphasise the way cultural specificity affects the interpretation of history. In Carolyn Steedman's autobiography *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), she writes, 'This book is about lives lived out on the borderlands... for which the central interpretative devices of the culture don't quite work'. She argues that 'specificity of place and politics has to be reckoned with in making an account of anybody's life, and their use of their own past'.⁹ Although she is writing about her London childhood, this offers a clear articulation of points that are central to the issue of history within a postcolonial context. *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* raises questions about the interpretation of history by showing how vulnerable the historical record might be to individuals', and by extension to larger social or cultural groups' self-definitions. For instance, Farrell undermines the validity of the historical records from which she has taken the names for the characters of Allbones and Fowler Metcalfe; in the narrative, Allbones assumes Metcalfe's name and Metcalfe assumes his, showing how potentially fictional such records are. Thus, here, as in Wevers' account, 'Historical fictions expand with possibility in the ironized discourse of postmodernism, and provide a lens which can bend over the horizon of the objective and humanist truths of the historical record'.¹⁰ While Wevers does not explain what she means by 'humanist' here, this is true of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* in the way that I am using the term: the novel disrupts the concepts of the human species as exceptional and superior in relation to others, of human reason as permitting mastery over nature, and of the white male subject as autonomous and coherent, as part of its interrogation of colonial human-animal relations.

Set in the 1880s, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* explores one event in which the combination of imperialism and a belief in humans' mastery of nature irrevocably altered interspecies relations in New Zealand. Ferrets, stoats and weasels, introduced as the 'natural solution' to the country's overwhelming rabbit population, eradicated many already vulnerable bird species. Early conservationist Herbert Guthrie-Smith, describing 'the disgust felt at the freeing, firstly, of rabbits, and secondly, of weasels, in the Wairarapa', writes that 'It was an outrage that any individual or local body should have

⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape For a Good Woman: a Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), 4, 5.

¹⁰ Wevers, 'The Fact of the Matter', 57.

been allowed to attempt to correct a blunder by a crime'.¹¹ This view of the introduction of mustelids to New Zealand is shared by *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*. In its fictionalisation of this introduction, the novel provides an excellent example of the way the discourse of humanism figures at the root of both anthropocentric and imperialistic perspectives, and how these two perspectives functioned in tandem. Both imperialism and its subversion are illustrated in the novel almost exclusively in relation to human-animal relations. In the historical note, Farrell writes that New Zealand's European settlers 'brought with them religious notions of supremacy over nature, a fierce determination to reshape the land ... and a dispassionate curiosity shaped by that European mode of enquiry called natural science'(217).¹² It is the last of these which is the particular target of what I see as *Mr Allbones' Ferrets'* challenge to humanism.

Science

The nineteenth century was a formative period in Europe as well as New Zealand in terms of human-animal relations. During the eighteenth century, increasing numbers of naturalists had embraced the view that humans are animals. Notably, Carl Linnaeus categorised humans among the primates in his taxonomies. Nineteenth-century evolutionary theory built upon these challenges to the notion of human distinctiveness. Robert Chambers wrote, in his anonymously published *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), that 'Common observation shews a great general superiority of the human mind over that of the inferior animals', but that 'The difference between mind in

¹¹ Herbert Guthrie-Smith, *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1921), 334. <http://www.archive.org/details/tutirastoryofnew00guthuoft>

¹² If Farrell means that all settlers were guilty of these things, she is making a considerable oversimplification. Stafford and Williams, discussing Maoriland writing, naturally find that 'Not all colonial writers felt the same way about empire and race, and the writers themselves display conflicting and contradictory stances, often within a single text' (15). With regard to the introduction of mustelids, Carolyn King writes:

The sad thing about it all is that the dawning realization by the government of the need to protect the endemic native fauna was already growing rapidly at the very time that the introductions were going on, but it did not gain enough strength ... in time to prevent the introductions altogether.

Carolyn King, *Immigrant Killers: Introduced Predators and the Conservation of Birds in New Zealand* (Auckland, Melbourne, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 89-90. Farrell's comment thus obscures a more complex picture. Yet she presumably does not mean this unfavourable description to apply to *all* of the settlers, because it does not apply to Allbones, the protagonist in her own narrative. The comment refers, then, to those perspectives which had the most impact.

the lower animals and in man is a difference in degree only; it is not a specific difference'. He also argued that

mental action, being proved to be under law, passes at once into the category of natural things. Its old metaphysical character vanishes in a moment, and the distinction usually taken between physical and moral is annulled, as only an error in terms.¹³

More than thirty years later, in *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin echoed the first sentiment almost exactly: 'the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind'. Darwin also echoed Chambers' suggestion that reason and morality, those most defining human capacities, might be subject to natural law. However, Darwin took the idea further still by making suggestions about how those capacities might have evolved; he writes, for instance, that morality might simply have developed out of social interaction:

the social instincts, – the prime principle of man's moral constitution – with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise;' and this lies at the foundation of morality.¹⁴

Of course, the concept of evolution was often unpalatable: humans did not necessarily like the idea that they were animals or that they were related to other animals. Gillian Beer writes that evolutionism 'aroused many of the same dreads as fairy-tale in its insistence on the obligations of kinship, and the interdependence between beauty and beast. Many Victorian rejections of evolutionary ideas register a physical shudder'. She notes, for example, John Ruskin's response to 'the filthy heraldries which record the relation of humanity to the ascidian and the crocodile'.¹⁵ Where the implications of evolutionism were not entirely rejected, they were often applied in such a way as to maintain the status quo. Harriet Ritvo explains:

¹³ Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation and Other Evolutionary Writings*, 1844, ed. James A. Secord (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1994), 335-36, 331-32.

¹⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 105, 106.

¹⁵ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1983), 9, Ruskin cited in Beer, 9.

Although [Darwin's work] eliminated both the divine sanction for human domination and the separation between man and beast, it did not diminish human superiority. On the contrary, it described the very process by which that superiority has been established. Clearly, if people were animals, they were the top animals.¹⁶

In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, an upper-class scientist, Mr Pitford, and his teenage granddaughter and pupil, Eugenia, appear to subscribe to the interpretation of Darwinism as supporting human superiority and mastery. However, the protagonist, Walter Allbones, consistently, if often unknowingly, exposes the Pitfords' shortcomings and models alternatives to their attitudes and practices. The novel comes down firmly in favour of what I would describe as an anti-humanist reading of Darwinian Theory, in which it 'suggested that man was not fully equipped to understand the history of life on earth and that he might not be central to that history. He was neither paradigm nor sovereign'.¹⁷

One sense in which the Pitfords' ability to understand the natural world seems limited is in their perception of it. Indeed, sight and touch must be Eugenia's only fully-functional senses because she claims, 'I am tone deaf, just as I have no sense of smell' (92). She says, 'drawing is my one great talent' (92), and she hopes that one day her botanical and zoological sketches will be 'examined closely by naturalists and scientists' (90). However, this means reducing her subjects to reconstructed material which can only be understood in visual terms.¹⁸ Eugenia's sensory limitations make her an extreme case, but this approach was not uncommon, especially in colonial natural history where the specimens were often distant. Carol Freeman writes,

A 'specimen' of an animal discovered for the first time by Europeans in the colonies was an object to be examined and documented, generally and in minute detail. A drawing or engraving in a zoological work supplied what was perceived as a 'definitive' representation for the classification of new species, the identification of dead animals sent to museum collections and the recognition

¹⁶ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 40.

¹⁷ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 19.

¹⁸ They are unreliable even in visual terms: she says, 'most of the specimens I have to work from are dried and pressed. So it is not easy to imagine their original colour and setting' (83).

of live ones in the exploration of newly acquired countries, or for sporting purposes.¹⁹

Allbones, by contrast, has a far richer perception of life; indeed, he seems to have heightened senses. He can put his ear to the ground and hear the ‘murmurings of things growing and things easing through narrow crevices’, and the movement of his ferret in a rabbit hole: ‘the brush of something squeezing through a shaft, its fur burnishing clay’ (10). He can smell and identify ‘damp earth and last season’s rotting leaf’, ‘ferret musk and blood and raw spirit’ (21). He even interprets the Pitfords’ smells as other animals are understood to do, as social signifiers: ‘The stink of wealth is as strong as the markings of fox or cat’ (26):

... it is as though Allbones belongs to one species – a small species favouring the undergrowth, like moles or frogs or little disregarded birds – while Whiskers [Pitford] and his like belong to another: bigger animals whose scent is laid over wider territories. (28)

As Alain Corbin’s work shows, interpretations of different modes of sensory perception fluctuate. He writes that in nineteenth-century France, it was thought that ‘The delicacy of an individual’s atmosphere and the sensitiveness of his sense of smell were evidence of his refinement and proved his ignorance of the sweat of hard labor’. He notes, ‘This acuity could even become excessive ... delicate young girls, for example, might fall victim to parosmia (confusion of smells)’.²⁰ In *Mr Allbones’ Ferrets*, this class division is inverted in Eugenia and Allbones, together with an implication that sensory impairment is a deformity of the upper classes and perhaps a mark of inbreeding.²¹ Thus, the distinction between refinement and animality is maintained in terms of perception, but its values are inverted.

Initially, Eugenia seems emotionally limited too, unable to feel sorrow over animals, perhaps because, as Lynda Birke writes of her own scientific training,

¹⁹ Carol Freeman, ‘Figuring Extinction: Visualising the Thylacine in Zoological and Natural History Works 1808-1936’ (PhD diss., University of Tasmania, 2005), 35.

²⁰ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, trans. Aubier Montaigne (Leamington Spa, Hamburg and New York: Berg Publishers, 1986), 141.

²¹ The same inversion of the stereotypical class sensibilities appears in Farrell’s *The Hopeful Traveller*, where the aristocratic Monsieur de Marcigny has no sense of smell: ‘he was born deficient in that one regard.’ Fiona Farrell, *The Hopeful Traveller* (Auckland: Vintage, 2002), 26.

‘Learning to be objective means learning to distance yourself from those feelings’.²² Eugenia obviously considers her objectivity a mark of intellectual superiority. Allbones suggests, ‘If a bird dies, singing its heart out and flying up and up into the sky, you’d feel the loss of it in a way you’d never feel sad at stepping on some ugly great slug’ (95).²³ Eugenia refuses to answer this directly: she says that extinction is ‘not a matter for emotion’, and that his subjective appreciation for animal beauty is ‘irrelevant’ because ‘nature won’t care one way or another. Nature is concerned only with survival’ (95). In adopting this standpoint, Eugenia is disrupting gender stereotypes. Birke writes, ‘Objective detachment is, as feminist writers have often pointed out, stereotypically masculine in our culture ... while “not letting your emotions get in the way” is reminiscent of suppressing something feminine’.²⁴ Pitford, indeed, has consciously suppressed emotional and ‘feminine’ tastes in Eugenia; for instance, he ‘prefers her to read reality and not the romances so often preferred by young women’ (138-39). Consequently, when Allbones admires some insects she is collecting – thinking that, as a girl, ‘Of course she would collect what was pretty and colourful’ – she disrupts his assumptions. ‘I don’t collect them because they’re pretty... I collect them because they interest me. Especially the Odonata – that’s dragonflies... I already own one hundred and eighty specimens representing thirty-seven species’ (124). Then she says, ‘You have your ferrets. Do you collect them because they’re ‘pretty’?’ (125). Now it is Allbones’ turn to disrupt stereotypes. Although he kills both rabbits and ferrets, Allbones does not see anything wrong with having subjective appreciation for animals. He replies, ‘They’re useful... An’ I like ‘em, I suppose. I could use a dog for ratting ... but I prefer the ferrets. I like their faces ... they don’t care what you think,

²² Lynda Birke, *Feminism, Animals and Science: The Naming of the Shrew* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 46.

²³ His impression that extinction is ‘a pity’ is not a view which all natural scientists avoided: Walter Buller, in the epigraph to Leigh’s chapter five, writes of the demise of the pitoitoi (robin) that ‘Ornithologists everywhere must regret this’, and describes his own affection for the species (Farrell, 119). See Walter L. Buller, *A history of the birds of New Zealand*, 2nd ed. (Published by the author, London, 1888), 35. <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-BulBird.html>

²⁴ Birke, *Feminism, Animals and Science*, 46.

not the way a dog cares ... An' yes, they're pretty creatures' (125).²⁵ Indeed, Allbones even demonstrates humility in his personal relationships with animals. When Pinky (one of his ferrets) bites him after he starts to doubt her, he interprets her action as making 'some point about due patience and due respect' (20). Rather than insisting on mastery, he is accepting the perceived reproof. Allbones and Eugenia thus invert the gendered stereotypes associated with objectivity and subjectivity in relation to animals. The effect in the novel is to make Eugenia's view appear more detached and destructive.

Indeed, what both Pitford and Eugenia are doing is imposing their human ideas onto animals. They are participating in the construction of what Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert call 'animal spaces': 'abstract spaces... which are cleaved apart from the messy time-space contexts, or concrete places, in which these animals actually live out their lives as beings in the world'. Philo and Wilbert also note that 'Related to the conceptual placing of animals is also a strong human sense of the proper places which animals should occupy physically', and that although they bring animals atypically close to humans, zoos provide 'a highly tangible expression of the dual conceptual and material placements of animals'.²⁶ In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Eugenia 'places' local animals in both of these senses in her dragonfly collection: 'when they're dry I pin them onto cards and label them properly, then put them into my cabinet' (124). Eugenia is working towards conceptual order. She says, 'it is not done out of cruelty, but for science' (124), and asks, 'How else are we to understand the natural world?' (125). To Allbones, however, 'It does seem a shame, all this collectin', when they might be off flyin' about the fields and woods' (124). Later, seeing Pitford's taxidermy collections, Allbones laments this 'cabinetry in which the natural splendours of the world had been captured,

²⁵ In fact the ferrets are useful to him for more reasons than he can admit to Eugenia, because they are better for poaching in both size and appearance. He also breeds his ferrets with this purpose in mind, applying the concepts that Darwin describes as 'variation under domestication' (27): through selective breeding, he produces ferrets of 'A rich creamy white easy to spot out in the woods on a dark night, a white that made Allbones' kits the best of their kind for miles around' (17). Nevertheless, his stated personal liking for ferrets appears to be genuine. It is also unconventional. Ritvo writes that in the nineteenth-century many people favoured 'co-operative' animals like dogs and horses, which appeared to welcome human mastery, while animals which seemed not to acknowledge it, like cats, were often disliked and mistrusted (Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, 21-22). Yet what Allbones likes about ferrets is their indifference to mastery – a point which can, indeed, be seen to reflect his own attitudes to authority.

²⁶ Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, eds. 'Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: An Introduction,' in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 6-7, 10, 13.

labelled, studied and understood' (55). Allbones' view, indeed, resonates with some contemporary opinions of collection, such as that expressed in another recent New Zealand novel, *Butler's Ringlet*, by a protagonist who is increasingly disgusted with his own moth collection:

Occasional images of nineteenth-century naturalists would spring to [Warwick's] mind: men who killed and collected vast quantities of insects or birds in what seemed like total disregard for the impact on the environment. To be located among that group of people, now, in the twenty-first century ... struck him as shameful.²⁷

Of course, Warwick's view is probably also informed by the knowledge, perhaps less apparent to Allbones, of the extent to which colonial collections were also imperialistic.

In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, imperialism is a significant feature of Pitford's practices. The abstract 'animal spaces' which he imposes are European taxonomic categories, while the physical ones are enclosures in Europe. Pitford organises animals on an international scale, echoing the colonising natural history of the previous century described by Mary Louise Pratt:

natural history called upon human intervention (intellectual, mainly) to compose an order... One by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order.²⁸

Pitford displaces New Zealand animals from their habitats, and brings them, alive or dead, half way around the world into European 'animal places', both physical and conceptual.²⁹

One of the European concepts being imposed is language. When Allbones encounters Pitford's specimens, both plants and animals, he is struck by the unpronounceable names they have been given as part of the classification process. Birke explains:

²⁷ Laurence Fearnley, *Butler's Ringlet* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2004), 144-45.

²⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 31.

²⁹ His taxidermy cabinets include 'birds with big flat orange paddling feet and crests brushed erect', 'lizards far larger than any lizard Allbones had ever seen in his life', 'round brown birds' which remind Allbones of quail, and 'two pigeons with feathers of luminous bluegreen and white vests' (51). These are probably erect-crested penguins, New Zealand quail, tuatara and kereru (New Zealand woodpigeons) respectively.

While the meanings of animals to humans were being contested in the wider society, scientists and naturalists were busy creating another set of meanings through the process of naming and describing. Colonial expansions meant not only the discovery of new species (by Europeans); it also entailed the development of systems of classification that were themselves mired in assumptions of European superiority, and which, inevitably, paid no heed to the classification systems of peoples indigenous to the areas from which the animals were taken.³⁰

Pitford's activities work in just these ways. Maori names are discounted and replaced with English and Latin: tui become 'prosthemadera novaseelandiae'. Weka become 'woodhens', and Pitford says that their spurs are 'Proof absolute of its correct assignation to the species *Gallirallus*!' (66).³¹ This naming system seems particularly irrelevant to the birds by contrast with the Maori one, in which at least some of names for birds are based on the sounds which they make themselves.³² The linguistic colonisation of animals is also performed directly by Eugenia. Allbones is startled to hear a tui calling 'hello' in her voice. In the wild, tui are imitative of other birds, and some captive tui are still encouraged to imitate humans.³³ The tui in the novel, significantly, *cannot* make other sounds anymore; Eugenia has replaced the tui's extensive repertoire and reduced it to a single English word. A stable boy tells Allbones, 'Used to sing when he first came, but now it's just Hello hello and bleedin' hello' (70). Emphasising the colonisation this entails, its call is later described as 'the voice that was foreign to it and not its own native tongue' (98). Thus, both Pitford and Eugenia demonstrate a disregard for the non-European in their linguistic colonisations of animals. The same is true of their pursuit of their primary scientific aims.

³⁰ Birke, *Feminism, Animals and Science*, 33.

³¹ Birke also observes that 'By the nineteenth century, in the heyday of Victorian empire, the names of British imperialists were frequently commemorated in the Latin names of newly discovered (or named) species' (Birke, *Feminism, Animals and Science*, 33). In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Eugenia's deceased father has been recognised in this way in the name of a Himalayan snow finch: *Montifringilla Pitfordii*.

³² Many Maori terms have resurfaced since; tui and weka long ago replaced parson bird and woodhen, while other birds are increasingly known by their Maori names (such as the kotuku or white heron).

³³ For instance, Woof Woof at the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre in New Zealand, produces various human phrases and tunes. <http://www.whangareinativebirdrecovery.org.nz/woofwoofvids.html>.

As Beer explains, 'Evolutionary theory emphasised extinction and annihilation equally with transformation – and this was one of its most disturbing elements, one to which gradually accrued a heavier and heavier weight in consciousness'.³⁴ This is Pitford's scientific focus. Eugenia says that he is 'one of the foremost authorities' (84) in this area and that he is working on a 'great catalogue. His definitive study of extinction' (92). However, this very study contributes to the phenomenon. As Carolyn King writes, 'Though they might not have been numerous, the collectors had a special significance in that they collected the rarest specimens'.³⁵ Farrell makes this point too, via several epigraphs detailing extensive collection catalogues, and one citing Walter Buller's paradoxical lament over the demise of the pitoitoi or toutouwai: 'Personally I regard this gentle Robin with a strong sentiment of affection ... It was the first bird of which I ever prepared a specimen' (119).³⁶ Pitford too is removing rare animals from their environment. The New Zealand quail which appear amongst his taxidermy were thought to be extinct even at the time when the novel is set,³⁷ while most of the other species in his collections are now classified as threatened in some respect.³⁸ His collection of live birds apparently ignores Darwin's emphasis on 'how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life'.³⁹ His acquisition of a pair of weka and his desire for a pair of huia,⁴⁰ already a rare species at the time, again ignores an opinion of Darwin's: 'Nothing is more easy than to tame an animal, and few things more difficult than to get it to breed freely under confinement, even in the many cases when the male and female unite'.⁴¹ For multiple reasons, then, taking rare birds into captivity seems particularly irresponsible. Like Eugenia's teaching of the tui, Pitford's attempts to

³⁴ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 16.

³⁵ King, *Immigrant Killers*, 78.

³⁶ Buller, *A History of the Birds of New Zealand*, 35.

³⁷ New Zealand quail supposedly became extinct in 1875 (before the year in which *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* is set), although it has recently been suggested that quails on Tiritiri Matangi Island may be of the native species. http://www.wildlifeextra.com/do/ecco.py/view_item?listid=1&listcatid=258&listitemid=1781.

³⁸ Rod Hitchmough, Leigh Bull and Pam Cromarty, comps, 'New Zealand Threat Classification System lists 2005,' <http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/science-and-technical/sap236.pdf>.

³⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 1859, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 67.

⁴⁰ That he wants this species in particular is significant because to Maori, huia feathers were symbols of rank. Pitford, of course, hopes to advance his own position through the possession of huia, which he believes (correctly) are soon to become extinct.

⁴¹ Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 9.

impose European scientific theory onto non-European animals have the potential to be very destructive.

Thus, through the contrasting characters of the Pitfords and Allbones, Farrell sets up the novel's thematic concern with imperialistic science as colonising animals. The Pitfords are detached from the natural world in their modes of perception and their rational objectivity, and they remove animals from their natural habitats in order to impose their European human systems onto them, regardless of whether or not they eradicate them in the process. These imagined colonisers are thus both anthropocentric and imperialistic, and through the contrasts with Allbones, the novel conveys a strong sense of distance from them. The condemnation of historical treatments of animals then intensifies as Pitford commits his greatest offence, in the novel's terms, in contributing to the introduction of mustelids to New Zealand.

The natural solution

In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin explains that

Every being, which during its natural lifetime produces several eggs or seeds, must suffer destruction during some period of its life, and during some season or occasional year, otherwise, on the principle of geometrical increase, its numbers would quickly become so great that no country could support the product.

He notes that there is 'striking' evidence of this 'from our domestic animals of many kinds which have run wild in several parts of the world'. He concludes, 'Lighten any check, mitigate the destruction ever so little, and the number of the species will almost instantaneously increase to any amount'.⁴² This was exactly the problem with the rabbits introduced to New Zealand: they had no natural check. King writes that their population increase was such that 'By the 1870s, runholders were becoming alarmed... Sheep died from starvation by the hundreds, and it is no exaggeration to say that the majority of the high-country pastures were ruined'.⁴³ Pitford is aware that this problem could have been predicted and avoided. He says, '*Oryctolagus cuniculus* is proving yet again, when introduced to virgin territory devoid of any customary predators, to be a

⁴² Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 53-4, 54, 56.

⁴³ King, *Immigrant Killers*, 82.

tasty but troublesome guest. As history might have warned us he would' (58). He explains how Ancient Roman colonies on the Gymnesian Islands suffered from the introduction of one pair of rabbits. 'From this single Lagomorphic Adam and Eve a vast progeny had sprung, so that the very houses of the Gymnesiae were being undermined, trees were toppling, crops were being consumed and famine threatened' (59).⁴⁴ He also knows that the Roman Empire responded to the problem by sending mustelids. In implementing this solution for New Zealand, Pitford perceives history as offering proof of its effectiveness (and perhaps also an ennobling parallel between the British and Roman Empires). He says to Allbones, 'History supplies the precedent ... and it is history, too, that teaches the solution. The "wildcats from Africa"... Ferrets!' (60). However, Pitford is missing the broader lesson that humans cannot predict the course of nature. King explains that some New Zealand settlers were aware of the dangers: many acclimatization societies had learned their lesson in relation to rabbits, and they and ornithologists strongly objected to the proposed introduction of mustelids. Walter Buller, one of the scheme's most eloquent opponents, said in an 1876 meeting of the Wellington Philosophical Society that 'the grave question to be considered is whether, in the attempt to put down one evil, you are not permitting a larger one to grow up into its place'.⁴⁵ However, these objections were overruled, and both government-sponsored and private shipments of ferrets began in 1884. In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Pitford is in charge of a (presumably private) shipment of this kind.⁴⁶

Although, as the title suggests, the mustelids are always under Allbones' care, he is made to seem a more or less innocent party in the overall project. He becomes

⁴⁴ Perhaps H.G. Wells was aware of the history of rabbit introductions in writing *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, where the introduction of rabbits to Moreau's island (by his assistant Montgomery) proves problematic. Montgomery introduces the rabbits for food, not liking to be vegetarian like Moreau. The rabbits, however, rekindle a taste for blood in the beast people too and contributes to their reversion to an animal state; ultimately, they kill Montgomery himself. Of course, the messages of the novels are slightly different: Montgomery is guilty of failing to distinguish himself from animals; in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* New Zealand's Pakeha settlers are portrayed as failing to recognise that they should not try to manipulate nature because they are *not* distinct from it. H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 1896, ed. Leon Stover (Jefferson: McFarland, 1996).

⁴⁵ W. L. Buller, 'On the proposed introduction of the Polecat into New Zealand', *Transaction and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 9 (1877):634-5, cited in King, *Immigrant Killers*, 85. See http://rsnz.natlib.govt.nz/volume/rsnz_09/rsnz_09_02_008740.html

⁴⁶ Pitford does not specify, but according to her historical note, Farrell has taken the names Allbones and Metcalfe from 'receipts for a consignment of stoats ordered in 1885 by the Wairarapa runholder, Edward Riddiford' (271).

involved after impressing Pitford with his understanding of animals. On the night of their first meeting, the Pitfords have been waiting outside a badger sett without seeing any cubs. When they meet Allbones, he is able to tell them where they are and why: 'Boar and sows moved a month 'n' more since, when the stream backed up and flooded. They can't stand it wet in the sett, not when they're kindlin'' (28). Allbones enjoys the experience of undermining Pitford; 'He cannot resist it: a featherweight punch at the older man's pompous certainty' (29). However, Pitford simply appropriates Allbones' skills. When they meet, he must suspect that Allbones has been poaching. He asks around and learns that Fowler Metcalfe, whose name Allbones has given as his own, is known to deal in ferrets. He announces, 'I could do with the assistance of a man like yourself, a man with a strong practical knowledge of this part of the country' (56). This sort of reliance on the lower classes was a seldom-acknowledged feature of much natural scientific investigation. Just as overseas, 'Obtaining specimens ... relied on the (unacknowledged) expertise of indigenous peoples',⁴⁷ educated scientists also relied on 'uneducated' Europeans. Bob Iliffe observes that in the 1600s, 'The Royal Society of London published advice in the early numbers of the *Philosophical Transactions* for sailors and gentlemen travellers to make observations in ethnography and natural history to report back to both the Society and the Admiralty'.⁴⁸ Similarly, in New Zealand's nineteenth-century search for a solution to rabbits, King writes:

Most of the stoats and weasels probably came from British stock; there were about 17,000 gamekeepers employed on 'vermin control' on the great game estates in Britain at the time, who were no doubt delighted to be paid twice for catching these relatively abundant small predators on their beats.⁴⁹

In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Pitford employs Allbones in this role, and as a buyer of ferrets, and later, together with the real Fowler Metcalfe, as their keeper on the ship. Allbones,

⁴⁷ Birke, *Feminism, Animals and Science*, 33.

⁴⁸ Bob Iliffe, 'Science and Voyages of Discovery', in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg, Roy Porter, Ronald L. Numbers and Mary Jo Nye (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 602. Farrell herself makes a similar point in *The Hopeful Traveller*, when the gardener Firmin has to accompany his employer's niece and her friends as they try to establish a utopian island off New Zealand. He has explained to them the rudiments of fertilising melons, and they declare him 'a philosopher of muck!', and conclude (quite correctly) that 'They would have need of a philosopher Melonist' in setting up their colony. Farrell, *The Hopeful Traveller*, 31, 56.

⁴⁹ King, *Immigrant Killers*, 86.

then, is a vital instrument rather than an orchestrator of their introduction. The blame is laid at Pitford's door, because he is the one with the power, and more importantly, because he is also the one who should have known better.

Given his position as an expert on New Zealand extinctions, Pitford must know that the birds there are vulnerable; indeed, upon receiving his pair of weka, he says that their wings are 'perfect proof ... of the laws of natural adaptation... In the absence of predators, the bird has no need of flight and its wings have become ... no more than ornament' (66). This suggests an awareness of Darwin's discussion of use and disuse as a cause of variation under nature:

As the larger ground-feeding birds seldom take flight except to escape danger, I believe that the nearly wingless condition of several birds, which now inhabit or have lately inhabited several oceanic islands, tenanted by no beast of prey, has been caused by disuse.⁵⁰

If, despite knowing that the birds have no defences, and despite the outcry in New Zealand over the proposal, Pitford does not consider mustelids a threat to the birds, then he appears very foolish. It seems more likely, though, that he is simply unconcerned by the risks. One possibility is that he considers, as Eugenia does, that colonial introductions are advancing a natural process. She says that New Zealand birds are becoming extinct because they are 'encountering the blackbirds and starlings of the English countryside', and that 'It is a law of nature that competition for resources is fiercest between those creatures that most resemble one another, and in this battle the indigenous species are destined to fail' (93). The first of these ideas presumably comes from Darwin, who writes:

As species of the same genus have usually, though by no means invariably, some similarity in habits and constitution, and always in structure, the struggle will generally be more severe between species of the same genus, when they come into competition with each other, than between species of distinct genera.

At one point, Darwin also implies that the species of New Zealand are evolutionarily inferior to European ones:

⁵⁰ Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 111.

Natural selection tends only to make each organic being as perfect as, or slightly more perfect than, the other inhabitants of the same country with which it has to struggle for existence. And we see that this is the degree of perfection attained under nature. The endemic productions of New Zealand, for instance, are perfect one compared with another; but they are now rapidly yielding before the advancing legions of plants and animals introduced from Europe.⁵¹

This sort of naturalising of extinction was very common. Walter Buller, cited in epigraphs to the novel's chapters, was an eloquent protester against the introduction of mustelids, but in his lament over the demise of the pitoitoi or robin, he attributes it to wild cats or rats or to 'some inescapable law of nature'. Even though wild cats and rats were introduced, and even where he makes a direct link between the pitoitoi and Maori (the inclusion of this epigraph being the novel's only reference to Maori), he avoids blaming colonisation; indeed, he blames the Maori for their own decline, which he assumes will also result in extinction. 'Well may the Maori say, as he laments over the decadence of his own race – "Even as the Pitoitoi has vanished from the woods, so will the Maori pass away from the land and be forgotten"' (119-120). Robert Paddle finds a similar displacement of responsibility in attitudes to the thylacine or Tasmanian tiger. He writes, 'the animal was said to be primitive, unfeeling, un-adaptable and stupid ... and really had only itself to blame for becoming extinct'. Paddle, who suggests that all the possible causes of the thylacine's extinction might have had their origin in colonisation, considers that such arguments were simply attempts to construct 'scientific innocence'.⁵² However, the above passages from *The Origin of Species* show that Darwin saw the difference between natural and human-induced competition. Thus, it would be a misreading as well as 'dangerous in the extreme', as David Owen puts it, 'to ascribe positive Darwinian notions of the survival of the fittest (that humans need to eat) to justify extinction of, say, the dodo or the passenger pigeon'.⁵³ This is what Eugenia appears to be doing in presenting the extinction of New Zealand species as if it were natural and inevitable. If Pitford shares this view, this might explain why he has no

⁵¹ Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 64, 164.

⁵² Robert Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 207, 204.

⁵³ David Owen, *Thylacine: The Tragic Tale of the Tasmanian Tiger* (Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin, 2003), 27.

qualms about importing species which might accelerate extinction. However, there is also another possible explanation. Eugenia reports:

My grandfather says we are enormously fortunate to be living in this era. Extinction normally takes ages and ages, but in the islands of the Pacific, so recently settled, science has the perfect laboratory to examine the process at close quarters. (94)

The repeated descriptions of New Zealand as a ‘laboratory’ suggest that to Pitford, it is primarily a resource, like Eugenia’s insects, for the advancement of science. Furthermore, the fact that Pitford considers rapid extinctions advantageous gives rise to the possibility that in sending mustelids to New Zealand, he may be knowingly promoting extinction as a means of promoting himself. Thus, Pitford’s expertise in the area of extinction potentially inculpates him.

Again, Pitford’s characterisation is contrasted with that of Allbones, who demonstrates a strong sense of duty towards animals which he has interfered with:

He had lifted them from their appointed place among hedgerows and fields and woods, where they were safe and could lead the lives they were intended for... now it was his task to convey them, whole and sound, to the other side of the world. (148-49)

The idea that animals are ‘intended’ for certain lives in certain ‘appointed places’ might suggest that Allbones believes in a divine plan. His sense of duty also resonates with the epigraph to the chapter in which the characters embark, which, taken from the story of Noah’s Ark, ends with God telling Noah and his sons that the animals shall dread them, but also, ‘Into your hand they are delivered’.⁵⁴

However, religion is not the primary source of Allbones’ principles. He has had very little religious education, and when Eugenia supposes that he believes in the creation story, he says ‘Can’ say I’ve given it much thought’ (86). Instead, Allbones simply feels that he has obligations to the mustelids. During the voyage to New Zealand,

⁵⁴ Of every clean beast shalt thou take to thee by sevens, the male and his female, and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of the fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female: to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth... And God blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth and upon all the fishes of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. (Genesis, 7:2-3; 9:1-2, in Farrell, 134)

he tends them as if they are not unlike humans. 'He had the mulatto cook add warm water to their slops, and plumped up their straw bedding. He kept the tarpaulin drawn to protect them from the great waves' (176). When some die, 'They were dropped over the side, like the children... carried in their parents arms to the rail' (176). The alternative is to permit cannibalism: 'he knew that they would be indifferent to cannibalising their own kind, in fact would welcome the fresh titbit' (178). However, as in *Life of Pi*, cannibalism might be the purely rational approach but it is not morally acceptable to Allbones. 'He could not quite bring himself to feed his ferrets to one another' because 'it seemed indecent' (178). Instead, like David Lurie in *Disgrace*, he treats animal bodies with a degree of dignity which suggests that his sense of commonality with them extends beyond reason and even compassion toward a quasi-spiritual respect. This means breaking both with a purely rational view, like that apparently held by the Pitfords, in which animal death does not matter, and with traditional religious views in which humans are spiritually distinct from other species. Nevertheless, Allbones' position does little to thwart the anthropocentrism being practised all around him. It is instead disrupted by nature and animals.

Subversions

In his article 'The Postcolonial Animal', Philip Armstrong writes:

Defined as that bit of nature endowed with voluntary motion, the animal resists the imperialist desire to represent the natural (and especially the colonial terrain) as a passive object or a blank slate ready for mapping by Western experts.⁵⁵

Mr Allbones' Ferrets' primary critique of colonial anthropocentrism derives from disruption by natural events and by animals themselves.

One respect in which this occurs in the novel is in the tendency of bodies to subvert the distinctions that the scientist characters (although they are familiar with the concept of human evolution) are trying to retain between humans and other species. One example of this is illness. The mustelids emphasise the commonalities between species because they are susceptible to some of the same conditions as humans. While

⁵⁵ Philip Armstrong. 'The Postcolonial Animal.' *Society and Animals* 10, 4 (2002): 413-19, <http://psyeta.org/sa/sa10.4/armstrong.shtml>

Allbones is collecting animals for Pitford, he finds that some are becoming sick from contact with another of Pitford's employees. He admonishes the boy: 'They takes the influenza! Just like us! ... What was you thinkin' of, to tend 'em when you're ill?' (111).⁵⁶ Later, on the voyage to New Zealand, the rapid temperature transition in the tropics again causes apparently related illnesses in humans and animals: children die from 'a kind of pneumonia not unlike the disease that was carrying off the ferrets' (176). Another feature shared between humans and mustelids during the voyage is increased libido in warm weather. Because sexual urges are considered 'animal', this is acceptable in the mustelids: Allbones and Metcalfe can take male to female until all are 'safely serviced and in kindle' (167). The human parallel is apparent, even if it is expressed in jest, to the characters themselves. When Allbones says that the mustelids are, 'come into season and if they're not mated they'll die', another man replies, 'Sure and I understand them completely... That's myself, so' (168). However, as Marian Scholtmeijer writes, 'Human sexuality is ... treated as unwholesome to the extent that it imitates the habits of animals... Innocent biological drives, then, are landed with a heavy burden of guilt'.⁵⁷ The human passengers must attempt to exercise intellectual and moral restraint – characteristics that were thought to separate human from beast – and they condemn each other for any weakness in this regard. A prime example of this point surfaces in the form of Eugenia's unsuspected pregnancy.

When Eugenia suddenly goes into labour, the other passengers initially accuse Pitford of being the father and turn on him, but Metcalfe blames Allbones and attacks him, supported by an angry mob. Afterwards, the ship's doctor judges Allbones:

He had no time for men like this one, pleasing themselves, exercising no restraint, prey to every carnal whim. A man needed discipline and a proper degree of moral fortitude or else he was no better than the beasts. No glorious piece of work...but a brute, a clever monkey, as the men of science had proven by the steady accumulation of fact. (199-200)⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ferrets are consequently used in influenza research in the present. See for instance Susan Brown, 'History of the Ferret', <http://www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&A=496>

⁵⁷ Marian Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 183.

⁵⁸ This is the same conceptual division that is literalised in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in which Jekyll seeks to separate the rational and animal sides of himself into two

This is the opposite of the idea raised by Chambers that evolution invalidates the distinction between the physical and the moral. The doctor feels, as Pi seems to in *Life of Pi*, that human animality threatens the boundaries between humans and the rest of nature. Since humans are no more than clever monkeys, he concludes that only humans' discipline and morality set them apart from other animals. However, if Allbones has failed to restrain himself (assuming his relationship with Eugenia is sexual), he is not the only one: so have the scientists.

Eugenia is so surprised by her pregnancy that although she must be aware that evolutionary theory undermines a human/nature divide, she has apparently been thinking of herself in terms of a mind/body divide which has more in common with Cartesian thought. Descartes argued:

because, on the one side, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, in as much as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I (that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am) is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it.⁵⁹

Eugenia has made a similar distinction, perhaps unconsciously, by failing to acknowledge how the principles of biology apply to her own body. Intellectually, she has known that 'Everything is alive and changing in little ways that we, who are changing ourselves, cannot detect' (86), but she has disregarded even detectable changes in herself: 'I did know something was different, but I decided it was just ill health and that the voyage would make me better' (203). Consequently, she is emotionally unprepared for motherhood. 'Eugenia had been moved to her cabin, where she remained listless in her bed, refusing all food, refusing all contact with her child' (195). When she finally does acknowledge him, Eugenia has an apparently physical experience of the instincts which she has so far evaded:

She feels his grip and in her stomach there is an uncurling, like something growing. She takes a moment to identify it, but thinks it might conceivably be

distinct identities. However, through the ultimate failure of this experiment (Hyde takes over), Stevenson makes the point that humans in fact need both of these facets of their being. Robert Louis Stevenson *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886; repr., Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1994).

⁵⁹ René Descartes (1641), 'Sixth Meditation', in *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 2003), 112.

the beginnings of that sensation she has read about: the one Allbones called 'love'. (210)

Her dawning understanding of this emotion undermines her initially extreme rational position. However, it also situates her in the conventional female roles which she has hitherto avoided. Although Allbones knows the child is not his (because she must have conceived before they met), he accepts Pitford's suggestion that he take responsibility and marry her regardless (206). This means that the narrative effectively relegates her to traditional female roles. Defined by her biology, Eugenia, who has had scientific aspirations and who tries to depart from the gender stereotypes of romance, ends up in an apparently clichéd relationship with the protagonist in which he rescues her from the villain (and from impending social doom) and makes her his wife. However, she is not the only person to be redefined by the birth of this child: it reveals that not only the lower classes or women, but also upper-class men, can be governed by the body.

After the characters reach New Zealand, it is revealed that Pitford has committed incest with Eugenia. Describing her baby, the narrator explains,

The tide of life runs strongly in him. But then it should, shouldn't it? For as anyone conversant with the scientific breeding of livestock will tell you, the strongest progeny are those fathered by the grandsire... why should the laws of genetics be any different for primates? We are just clever monkeys after all, subject to the same regime of natural selection. (213)⁶⁰

This emphasis on scientific principles suggests that, theoretically, Pitford could have acted or at least justified his actions on the basis of such ideas.⁶¹ However, given the potential social consequences, it seems unlikely that he intended to father a child. In that case, he has failed to exercise control over his own and Eugenia's nature, so that instead, these are the forces that come to shape the lives of Allbones and Eugenia.

In this way, the novel can be seen to suggest that because nature exerts influence over humans, it also exerts influence over history. On one hand, historical records are shown not to be objective, because humans manipulate them. Emphasising the extent to which migration could mean self-definition, some of the passengers speculate about

⁶⁰ Eugenia's own name, of course, is a reference to this: both in appearance and in meaning it is associated with eugenics, the selective breeding of humans.

⁶¹ Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, 331-32.

whether Pitford is really Eugenia's grandfather, and realise that 'from now on, anyone might be whoever they said they were' (193). For the Pitfords, this means that they can conceal the ways in which they have been defined by nature. When Allbones assumes responsibility for Eugenia's pregnancy, their marriage records them as Mr and Mrs Metcalfe, overwriting both Allbones' original name and the baby's parentage. In this way, the human authorship of records works to elide the influence of nature. On the other hand, however, the novel as a whole implies that 'real' history is quite different, and while humans clearly shape it, they cannot necessarily do so in the ways that they intend, because other forces are also at work.

The novel thus underscores evolutionism's anti-humanist implication that apparently rational and objective human subjects do not govern but are governed by nature, and therefore are not central to the history of life on earth. Because this is such a familiar concept in the present, the novel's emphasis on it seems somewhat heavy-handed. However, this is of central relevance to the novel's representation of human-animal relations, because humans' inability to govern nature leaves animal immigrants space to self-define as well, and thus to disrupt humans' interventionist endeavours in the way that Armstrong describes.

Animal actions

Philo and Wilbert observe that animal disruptions of human ordering sometimes create the unsettling impression that other species might have agency as well as humans. They write:

the concept of 'resistance' is generally taken to entail the presence of conscious intentionality, seemingly only a property of *human* agency in that only humans are widely recognised to possess self-consciousness and the facility for acting on intentions with a view to converting plans into outcomes.⁶²

However, as Philo and Wilbert recognise, animals need not always meet these criteria in order to resist humans. Regardless of whether or not they do so deliberately (or whether humans are capable of deciding this point), animals do sometimes act, individually or collectively, in ways which humans do not expect and which frustrate human

⁶² Philo and Wilbert, 'Animal Spaces, Beastly Places', 15.

endeavours. In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, there are several minor instances of this on the part of individual animals. While Pitford is authoritatively examining a weka, it excretes over him. A ferret runs up the trousers of Pitford's grumpy carpenter and bites him, and another sprays Eugenia while she is trying to instruct Allbones. Of course, these 'animal actions' are only subversive at the micro-level of the narrative; Farrell has imagined them and timed them to *look* subversive. However, the large-scale equivalents of these moments in the novel are historical. Here, although they are still mediated by the text, Farrell is employing real rather than invented instances of animal subversion.

Eugenia's nightingales provide one example of this. She has brought a pair with her on the voyage in the hope that they will populate the New Zealand bush, 'for she simply could not imagine a country devoid of the nightingale's song, no matter how charming the songs of its native species' (157). She says,

I know that, scientifically, birdsong is nothing more than an expression of territorial possessiveness or an attempt to attract a mate... but I cannot resist the conviction that the call of a nightingale is much to be preferred to any dreary piano sonata. (157)

This expression of aesthetic partiality seems more consistent with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's estimation of nightingales than with Eugenia's earlier claims of tone-deafness and scientific objectivity.⁶³ It shows that Eugenia does have appreciation for beauty after all; however, especially given that she has already erased the song of one New Zealand's native birds, it is clear that her preference is for the European. As she has said to Allbones, Eugenia is also of the opinion that nature will display similar preferences. Certainly, 'Blackbirds thrive here, and thrushes. And the house sparrows released by mistake for hedge sparrows in Lyttelton have produced a mighty progeny that infest farms the length and breadth of the country and must be poisoned' (214). But as the narrator asserts, 'Nature's laws are all-powerful. Her clever monkeys cannot anticipate how new organisms will conduct themselves once released into a strange environment' (214). King observes that 'A surprising proportion of attempted

⁶³ The speaker of one of his poems similarly describes their singing as music: 'choral minstrelsy, / As if some sudden gale had swept at once/ A hundred airy harps!' (vv80-82). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Nightingale,' 1798, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. H.H. Jackson (1985, repr., Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 101.

introductions failed. Only 36 species of exotic birds are now established, of 130 ... and 33 species of mammals, of 51'.⁶⁴ Eugenia is wrong, then, to assume that that natural selection always favours European species. The introduction of nightingales to New Zealand was tried in reality, but without success; in 1900, F.W. Hutton observed that there was inadequate insect life to sustain nightingales in the New Zealand winter, but he believed that instinct was the main barrier to introducing migratory birds.⁶⁵ In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Eugenia's nightingales 'stay only for that summer. And in the autumn they fly south ... seeking in the wide and empty reaches of the Pacific the warm breeding grounds of Africa' (214). Thus, even though the nightingales do not benefit themselves at all, Eugenia's Eurocentric project is nevertheless undermined by their actions. The same is true of the much larger project of the introduction of mustelids to New Zealand.

Here, the fact that she is re-presenting historical events allows Farrell to take an indirect approach. She can assume that at least some of her readers will have some idea that mustelids caused extinctions, and she represents this obliquely via a short passage giving the impressions of Pinky:

Her pink nose whiffles as she smells the sweet deep soil of her new home. She smells feathers and flesh and warm blood. She hears thousands upon thousands of birds singing songs new to her: korimako and tui. Piopio, miromiro, matata, hihi, kakariki, kaka and unsuspecting huia... She sniffs and presses her lithe and perfect body against the cage, eager for release. Not long now. (213)

This passage underscores Pinky's growing power: she is no longer mediated by Allbones as the moment approaches when she will be released and move outside human control. The references to her perception of the bird life all around her, meanwhile, point to the extinctions that will result. However, the passage also raises certain problems. One is that the narrative purports to enter into the being of an animal. As

⁶⁴ King, *Immigrant Killers*, 65.

⁶⁵ Hutton concludes:

It is the same with all insect-eating birds—like nightingales, which cannot support themselves in the winter in the absence of insect life... But, in my opinion, it is idle to attempt to introduce into New Zealand any bird that has inherited strong migratory instincts... So, I am afraid, it always will be, and attempts to introduce migratory birds into New Zealand will always end in failure.

Hutton, F.W., 'Our Migratory Birds,' *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand 1868-1961* 33 (1900): 264. http://rsnz.natlib.govt.nz/volume/rsnz_33/rsnz_33_00_006270.html.

Thomas Nagel has famously argued, humans can assume that other creatures have experience, but we cannot imagine what it is like to *be* another animal. He writes, 'I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task'.⁶⁶ Elizabeth Costello makes the opposite argument in Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*: she claims that if, as a writer, 'I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then, I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster'.⁶⁷ However, Costello is eliding the difference between a fictional character and a real animal, and given the possible authorial distance from her here, Coetzee may not be dismissing Nagel's argument. Pinky, of course, *is* a fictional character, but suddenly to enter into her impressions seems contradictory in the context of a novel which in part concerns the limits to humans' understanding of animals. A second potential problem with this passage is that Pinky is made to stand for all of the introduced mustelids. This reduces species to the level of the individual, an approach that Greg Garrard warns against: 'Writing extinction involves not simply the problem of representing absence, but also the difficulty of narrating ongoing systemic crises within intrinsically individualising forms such as the travelogue and the novel'.⁶⁸ Farrell's only negotiation of this consists in relying (arguably too heavily) on her readers' knowledge of the history which she is re-presenting; having alluded to it via Pinky's impressions, she stops short of narrating extinction at all. To represent it, Farrell would have to either continue the unmediated representation of Pinky and of other mustelids, or cover or skip some years until the human characters themselves could become aware that mustelids were having minimal impact on rabbits and a highly adverse affect on birds.⁶⁹ Either tactic would mean reducing the representation of extinction to the individual level, and the latter would alter the nature of the novel's ironic distance from

⁶⁶ Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?' *The Philosophical Review*, 83, 4 (1974): 439.

⁶⁷ J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 35.

⁶⁸ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 157-58.

⁶⁹ They certainly might live to realise this. Carolyn King explains that 'Within six years came the first reports of weasels and stoats spreading into forests far from their release sites and of dramatic declines in native birds in the forests of Westland and Fjordland'. 'By the turn of the century, even their former supporters could see that the passage-paid overseas experts were no match for the rabbits'. Carolyn King, *Immigrant Killers*, 88.

the characters. Instead, extinction is only approached directly in the historical note, which explains:

Hundreds of stoats, weasels and ferrets were imported from Britain at great expense and effort and released into New Zealand's fragile environment, whose bird species – many of them flightless – were already in retreat... The result has been a record of extinctions of bird species without equal anywhere in the world. (217)

This method allows Farrell to point out the extent of the mustelids' disruption of human manipulation without trying to fictionalise it at all. She leaves the interpretation of events to the readers themselves.

Because mustelids' deviation from human plans for them in New Zealand is an historical and not an invented scenario, some readers will already have knowledge of it or perhaps of a parallel one. For readers in this position, their knowledge means that they always participate in the novel's ironic view of the colonial past. Because most of the information about extinction is given after the text, and because this information is not extensive, there seems to be an assumption that the majority of readers know something about this. However, readers in this privileged position of participation are therefore unsurprised and unchallenged by the mustelids' actions. Indeed, by satirising mistakes with which these readers are already familiar, the novel might, counterproductively, foster a degree of complacency, even though this is obviously not Farrell's intention. It might be argued, indeed, that the experience of those readers who do not have good knowledge of mustelids' impact in New Zealand, a position apparently less anticipated by the narrative, is more conducive to the lesson which it seeks to convey. These readers are initially placed in much greater proximity to the novel's characters. Only going beyond Allbones' knowledge in the final chapter and historical note, they might apprehend the novel's lesson in much more immediate terms, permitting less complacency and more humility with regard to human-animal relations in general.

Nevertheless, Farrell's intended message is clear. For readers in either position, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* emphasises, first through the manifestations of humans' own animality, and then through the disruption of imperialistic scientific endeavours by

animals themselves, that the humans remain subject to nature, and that nature is not subject to them. Those characters who, like Eugenia, attempt to manipulate nature by redistributing other species are apparently thwarted by the unexpected actions of animals, while the more humble positions taken by others, like Allbones, are vindicated. The one character whose position remains ambiguous is Pitford. But even if he is corrupt, and therefore not disappointed by the mass extinctions occasioned by the mustelids in New Zealand, he is at least condemned by hindsight, as the novel echoes Guthrie-Smith's description of the so-called natural solution as responding to a blunder by a crime.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In presenting a narrative concerning the colonial introduction of mustelids to New Zealand, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* foregrounds the interrelationship between nineteenth-century imperialism and science, and presents the humanism that united them as an object of both condemnation and satire. The novel thus connects two major issues for white postcolonial cultures: colonial history and conservation. For white postcolonial people who are descended from colonial settlers, their history can carry with it a certain burden of guilt about the colonisation of first peoples, varying according to the context. However, whether as a way of bypassing or deflecting this kind of guilt or as a reminder that it extends still further, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* concentrates on showing how European settlement colonised animals. In doing so, the novel elides the usual understanding of colonisation, yet the colonisation of animals is not a metaphor: the arrival of European humans and other animals displaced, threatened and in some cases annihilated species native to the areas they settled. In this way, while the novel constitutes the kind of postcolonial interrogation of history that Lydia Wevers describes, it provides a specifically animal-oriented version of this trend: the shameful yet shared history it explores is a history of species relations. *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* thus suggests that white postcolonial cultures must inherit the sort of responsibilities towards animals that the nineteenth-century Allbones feels, because he has interfered with them. This is particularly pertinent in that the novel appears at a time when a new 'natural solution' to rabbits has recently been introduced to New Zealand. Since they became established,

⁷⁰ Guthrie-Smith, *Tutira*, 334.

the danger has always been that attempts to manage rabbits might threaten native animals. This danger was acknowledged when, in the late 1990s, the New Zealand Ministry of Health chose not to authorise the introduction of RHD, or rabbit haemorrhagic disease (then known as RCD or rabbit calicivirus disease). It was then deliberately imported by desperate farmers, in an illegal echo of the events of 1884. RHD was not transmitted to native birds, as was first feared, but has been a problematic introduction: it is regarded as an inhumane means of killing rabbits, and it has been only partially successful in containing their populations. To the extent that it has, that very success has sometimes made the ongoing presence of mustelids an increased threat to birds, as their alternative prey diminishes.⁷¹ *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* thus re-examines the origins of what is an ongoing problem in New Zealand, and implies that the negotiation of past mistakes needs to be performed with caution and not the arrogance with which they were committed. In doing so, the novel also connects its white postcolonial concerns with larger contemporary issues to do with environmentalism and conservation. The novel's message resonates with David Owen's point, expressed with regard to the fate of the Tasmanian tiger, that 'Extinction has always been integral to the life process, but when ... it is both manifestly unnatural and recent, it becomes our ineluctable duty to learn from the experience'.⁷²

In these respects, the novel's challenge to humanism takes the form of criticism and blame. The prioritisation of the interests of the European and the human in particular are presented as the causes of multiple extinctions of bird species in New Zealand. However, the novel also represents humans and animals in ways which directly undermine the assumptions on which such humanist privileging is based. Through the ironic depiction of its colonial scientist characters, Farrell emphasises that humans are 'subject to nature', in the form of 'natural' vulnerabilities, sexual desires and reproductive processes. Moreover, their apparent failure to predict the animals' response to their new setting similarly contradicts humanist ideas about the superiority of the rationalist and the European, and the assumption that humans can render history a

⁷¹ See for instance John Haselmayer and Ian G. Jamieson, 'Increased Predation on Pukeko Eggs after the Application of Rabbit Control Measures,' *New Zealand Journal of Ecology* 25,1 (2001): 89-93. http://www.nzes.org.nz/nzje/free_issues/NZJEcol25_1_89.pdf

⁷² Owen, *Thylacine*, 25.

narrative of their own progress. Instead, animals' resistance demonstrates that nature's power has not, after all, been tamed by human science at all. Thus, animals contribute to the novel's creation of ironic distance from the colonial heritage of imperialism and anthropocentrism against which white postcolonial cultures in the present seek to define themselves.

In these two ways, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* emphasises the species dimension of colonial imperialism and presents animals as participating in a resistance to humanism. Both of these themes also feature to varying extents in the novels treated in the remainder of this thesis. Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* displays a similar consciousness of the colonisation of animals which gives the issue of conservation an added pertinence within these contexts, while Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* presents animals, again, as resisting human manipulation. Both novels also emphasise the dangers of repeating past mistakes, exploring these through their different temporal settings, in ways that suggest a shared fear of the continued exacerbation of the sorts of cultural and species exploitations depicted in Farrell's novel.

4. What his ancestors have always done: repeating history in *The Hunter*

In the previous chapter, I discussed the representation of human-animal relations in an historical context in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, where, I suggested, the depiction of colonial science as colonising animals and animals' unexpected responses combine to offer an anti-humanist warning against repeating past mistakes. Continuing the chronological discussion of this section of the thesis, this chapter explores how similar ideas about the history of human-animal relations are represented within a contemporary context in Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* (1999).¹ This novel connects postcolonial and species issues in a similar way to *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, emphasising the relationship between the pursuit of international power and the destruction of rare animal species, in this case that of the Tasmanian tiger or thylacine, which has not been seen since the 1930s. However, Leigh brings its extinction into the present,² so that it becomes informed by contemporary influences on human-animal relations. I suggest that these influences take the form of the two contrasting versions of posthumanism set out in my introduction: technological and species posthumanism. However, technological posthumanism in this novel is not presented positively. The imperialism and natural science that are the cause of bird extinctions in New Zealand, and were the cause of the extinction of thylacines in the early twentieth century, have evolved in the contemporary setting of *The Hunter* into globalisation and technology, both represented by international biotechnology company that sends a man called 'M' to hunt the last thylacine.³ In the biotechnology company, I suggest, humans' interrelationship with technology may blur the boundaries of the figure of the humanist subject, but does not otherwise undermine it; rather, it perpetuates it through technohumanism. Indeed, in individual terms, technology empowers M in his desire

¹ Julia Leigh, *The Hunter* (1999; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

² The novel's action could also be understood to take place in the near future. References to a biological arms race and reliable cloning techniques suggest advances on present science (40, 166). However, the secrecy and power of the corporations involved might explain their possession of otherwise unknown technology, and no other details suggest the action is anything other than contemporaneous with the time of writing.

³ The codename M is never explained, but the fact that he has a codename at all underscores that he is a secret agent. The choice of letter also emphasises this point, being that used by the head of the SIS in Ian Fleming's James Bond fiction. (Fleming took this idea from the 'C' used by the real chiefs of the SIS, ever since its first chief, Mansfield Smith-Cumming, used his initial as his mark. M is first introduced in Ian Fleming, *Casino Royale* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953)). The letter also resonates with a 1931 Fritz Lang film entitled *M*, in which it is used to mark the coat of a serial killer to identify him as the 'murderer'. *M*, dir. Fritz Lang (Vereinigte Star-Film GmbH: 1931; Paramount: 1933). This meaning might be considered appropriate to *The Hunter* given the protagonist's relation to animals. A third possibility, suggested by ecofeminist elements in the novel and perhaps also the anti-humanist tone drawn out in my argument, is that 'M' is for 'Man'.

to contribute to history as he views it, as one long narrative of human mastery. Thus, the combined globalising and technohumanist values represented by the company and its agent are such that postcolonial Australians and native animals can be seen to have a common enemy. However, this does not result in a productive alliance, because both are presented as having limited agency to resist. Set against M and the biotechnology company are environmentalist characters who are deep ecologists: their philosophy is a quasi-spiritual interpretation of what I am calling species posthumanism: they understand life and the history of life (human and nonhuman) as part of a cycle of energy and matter. However, they are presented as having minimal agency in terms of human-animal relations. M's intended relation to the thylacine is more challenged by a redirection of what I term his 'hunterly empathy' towards positive relationships with his host, Lucy Armstrong, and her children, but an accident sees him return to his hunt and kill his prey after all. Ultimately, then, *The Hunter* engages with history in such a way as to question whether, given a second chance in a contemporary context, the history of human-thylacine relations would play out any differently. It does not contradict M's view of history, but it presents the results of accepting or promoting such a view as catastrophic.

History contemporised

Since the death of the last captive thylacine in Tasmania's Beaumaris Zoo in 1936, no conclusive proof of the species' survival has been recorded, and the general consensus is that it is extinct.⁴ The story of this extinction is understood to begin with European settlement. Thylacines were, of course, familiar to Aborigines, and more popular with some than with others. A positive Aboriginal view of thylacines is conveyed by the legend of 'Corinna, the brave one', in which a thylacine pup earns his stripes (literally) by rescuing a spirit boy, Palana, from a kangaroo.⁵ Historian Robert Paddle notes that while travelling in the 1830s, the preacher George Augustus Robinson found that 'while some Tasmanian Aboriginal groups ate thylacines, other groups and individuals revered the species and refused to do so'.

⁴ Robert Paddle considers that this animal was the last; David Quammen supposes that some wild thylacines may have outlasted it for a short time. Robert Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1. David Quammen, *Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction* (London: Hutchinson, 1996), 286.

⁵ Jackson Cotton, *Touch the Morning: Tasmanian Native Legends* (Hobart, OBM, 1979), cited in David Owen, *Thylacine: The Tragic Tale of the Tasmanian Tiger* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2003), 59-61.

Paddle concludes that ‘In similar manner to European attitudes to the thylacine, different Aboriginal groups had different perspectives on the value, importance, use and nature of the animal’.⁶ However, as Eric Guiler observes,

In Tasmania thylacines and Aborigines lived together into modern times, and since neither dogs and/or dingoes nor Aborigines can be held responsible for the decline and diminution of the thylacine in Tasmania, here we have to look at the activities of whites.⁷

Indeed, thylacines were present in Tasmania even after thousands of years of coexistence with Aborigines, but survived for less than 150 years after European settlement began at the start of the nineteenth century.

From a European perspective, thylacines were exotic, being both geographically foreign and very unusual, especially in terms of the taxonomic naturalism then in vogue. As well as being marsupials, their appearance suggested an intermingling of different species categories: their heads and bodies resembled those of dogs, while the dark stripes against their pale gold coats recalled the markings of feline tigers. This appears to have resulted in considerable confusion. English names for them included ‘Tasmanian wolf, marsupial wolf, zebra opossum, dog-headed opossum, opossum hyena, striped wolf’,⁸ and of course, tiger or Tasmanian tiger. Thus, thylacines were understandably seen as something of a marvel, both by scientists and by the general European public. Paddle writes that ‘there is a wealth of hitherto neglected nineteenth-century comment on the species, indicative of its having had a high profile amongst Tasmania’s naturalists and scientists at this period’.⁹ The result was that, like the New Zealand birds discussed in the previous chapter, thylacines were very much in demand for living and preserved natural historical collections, undoubtedly with considerable detriment to the survival of the species. There was demand both within Australia and internationally. Owen writes that ‘Thylacines were shipped to zoos in Antwerp, Berlin, Cologne, New York, Washington, and, mostly, London... They were keenly sought ... particularly when extinction warnings began to be made and it was also realised that they

⁶ Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 20.

⁷ Eric Guiler, *Thylacine: The Tragedy of the Tasmanian Tiger* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 14.

⁸ Quammen, *Song of the Dodo*, 282.

⁹ Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 219

did not breed in captivity'.¹⁰ By 2006, the International Thylacine Specimen Database directed by Stephen Sleightholme had found 714 specimens in 101 museum, university and private collections internationally. Sleightholme writes, 'This total represents an estimated body count of four hundred wild thylacines as in the majority of cases several specimens were normally taken from the same animal'.¹¹

Despite all this fascination with thylacines, however, they were accorded little practical protection. As I have noted previously, exoticisation of any description is an inherently 'othering' attitude, and not necessarily conducive to sympathy. In Tasmania, it fuelled dislike and fear of thylacines when they appeared to come into conflict with colonisers, and they began to be seen as monsters in the most negative sense. European settlers sought to appropriate Tasmania's resources for the purposes of agriculture and this encroached upon thylacines' habitat and brought foreign livestock into proximity with them. Although, according to Owen, 'the thylacine as a specialist predator would have an overwhelming natural preference for native prey',¹² their occasional interest in sheep caused them to become scapegoats. Biogeographer David Quammen explains:

domestic dogs brought ashore from British ships had gone feral in Tasmania, and those rampaging wild dogs were themselves killing quite a few sheep. Sheep were also being stolen, presumably by bushrangers, the runaway convicts who lived off the land. But the thylacine, an alien-seeming creature (though in ecological terms it was native and the sheep were alien), made a more satisfactory object of loathing and dread...

Thylacines took blame for killings they did commit and for many they didn't.¹³ Thylacines' exotic qualities and the related confusion surrounding them now facilitated their representation as aberrational and malevolent. In *The Hunter*, M shows in an imagined address to the thylacine (a habit that I explore below) that he is aware of the exaggerated reputation of thylacines:

You were the farmer's scourge, and your reputation went ahead of you: they said you roamed the country in yellow-eyed packs, padded through the night with bristling hair and drooling jaws agape, killing at will. Young women were afraid to go for afternoon

¹⁰ Owen, *Thylacine*, 109

¹¹ Sleightholme, Stephen. 'The International Thylacine Specimen Database' http://www.naturalworlds.org/thylacine/morefeatures/itsd/itsd_1.htm.

¹² Owen, *Thylacine*, 10-11.

¹³ Quammen, *Song of the Dodo*, 383.

strolls in case they crossed your path. You'd drag babies out of their frilly cots and wolf down frilly girls whole... no wonder... the government of the day offered a one-pound bounty for your hide. (47-48)

This characterisation of thylacines, which reads like something out of a European fairytale, accords with Owen's observation that the names for thylacines affected settlers' understandings of them. He writes, 'Colonial experience of, for example, Bengal tigers, meant stealth, ferocity, cunning, near-invisibility, powerful swimming, nocturnalism, awesome strength and, from time to time, man-eating'. Similarly, 'although there is no link to the canid family, the thylacine suffered through its perceived association with *Canis lupus*, the grey wolf of the Northern Hemisphere'.¹⁴ The demonization of thylacines is both an instance of the unreliability of popular history, and of the practical ramifications that human (mis)representations of animals can have. Farmers' accusations resulted in the establishment of various bounties on thylacines, including progressive ones,¹⁵ without, according to Guiler, any investigation into the claims being made.¹⁶ Hunting alone probably does not account for the extinction of the species, for as Guiler observes, 'If thylacines had been hunted to extinction ...it would be logical to expect the animals to disappear first from the places where they had been most vigorously hunted ... but this did not take place'.¹⁷ However, Paddle's four possible causes of the species' extinction are all associated with European colonisation: besides hunting, he lists disease (probably introduced),¹⁸ the destruction of the original environment and of native prey species, and the introduction of other carnivores. What this list implies is that one way or another, colonisation brought about thylacines' extinction.

Of course, efforts were made to protect the species. Paddle explains that concern was already being expressed in the nineteenth century, especially once the bounty came into force,

¹⁴ Owen, *Thylacine*, 9, 10.

¹⁵ Under the progressive bounty system, the more animals the hunter killed, the greater the reward. Quammen explains that this ensured the depletion of the species because it compensated for the increasing effort needed to find thylacines as they became rarer. Quammen, *Song of the Dodo*, 283.

¹⁶ Guiler writes, 'The decision was based upon wildly exaggerated claims which in reality covered up bad farming practice. No attempt was made to check the veracity of the claims, nor was any effort made to ascertain the numbers of thylacines doing the damage'. Guiler, *Thylacine*, 21.

¹⁷ Guiler, *Thylacine*, 26-27.

¹⁸ Paddle explains that 'An epidemic disease passed through the thylacine population at the end of the nineteenth century,' but guesses that 'the disease was episodic and debilitating, without necessarily being fatal'. He writes,

While the origins of the epidemic disease are unknown, it would appear far more likely to have arrived as an invasive micro-organism from the wealth of foreign species, deliberately and accidentally introduced into Australia by Europeans, rather than a chance introduction from a migratory bird or bat.

Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 202, 203.

and ‘During the first twenty years of the twentieth century broad environmental concerns surfaced in Tasmanian public debate’.¹⁹ He observes that scientists were increasingly advocating the protection of thylacines, as there was growing evidence of its decline. Both Paddle and Guiler, in his self-published account of the Animals and Birds Protection Board, regard Clive E. Lord, Director of the Tasmanian Museum and secretary of the Tasmanian Advisory Committee re Native Fauna, as one of the most successful advocates of the thylacine’s conservation.²⁰ Paddle explains that Lord recommended its total protection in a letter to his cousin J.E.C. Lord, chairperson of the committee, who responded by consulting the Tasmanian police about the status of the species. However, despite little evidence of thylacines’ presence, their protection was not recommended.²¹ In 1928, both cousins, together with Arthur Reid, who was trying to breed thylacines at Hobart Zoo, attended a Commonwealth Fauna Conference at which a subcommittee was appointed to list endangered species needing total protection. However, although ‘all three Tasmanian representatives at the conference in 1928 were personally and professionally committed to the immediate total protection of the thylacine’, there was not enough time to address mammals at all. In the same year, the Tasmanian government evaded the Native Fauna Advisory Committee’s request that the thylacine be placed on the protected list by dissolving the committee altogether and replacing it with the Tasmanian Animals and Birds’ Protection Board which represented hunting and agricultural interests. Clive Lord eventually persuaded this new Board to grant thylacines partial protection during the month of December. However, Guiler writes, ‘This was totally inadequate as by now it was too late to have any effect and few were being captured for export’. Finally, Joseph Pearson ‘successfully moved their total protection which was gazetted on 14 July 1936’.²² Paddle, who assumes the thylacine in Beaumaris Zoo was the last, comments, ‘Unequivocally, the species was totally protected for the last fifty-nine days of its existence’.

One of the explanations offered for their extinction was that thylacines were a primitive species, always destined to die out. Paddle explains that they were characterised as ‘an

¹⁹ Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 169.

²⁰ Eric Guiler, *The Enthusiastic Amateurs: The Animals and Birds Protection Board 1929-1971* (Sandy Bay: published by the author, 1999).

²¹ Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 176-77

²² Guiler, *The Enthusiastic Amateurs*, 180, 74

evolutionary experiment in every way inferior to placental mammals', an idea supported by the fact that in Europe, marsupials could only be found in fossil form. Theorists reasoned:

direct competition between placental and marsupial mammals ... was bound to be won by the higher European mammals, the Placentalia... The process of colonisation could readily be seen as ... likely to have but one conclusion: the eventual replacement and extinction of out-moded species by superior placental types.²³

This view is very similar to the imperialistic opinion expressed by Eugenia, in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, that animal introductions to New Zealand simply advanced natural selection.

'Primitivisation' was also being used to justify human-human relations. Lyndall Ryan notes that the supposed extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines 'became a source of grim celebration which accorded with another equally pervasive nineteenth century myth, namely, that the Aborigines as a people were inevitably doomed to extinction'. Ryan explains that the theory at the beginning of the twentieth century was that 'they were low on the scale of humanity, with such a primitive technology that they had no means to contain or withstand or even adjust to invasion from a technologically superior group'. She adds, 'More recently this view has been enlarged to the belief that as a result of ten thousand years of isolation..., by 1800 the Tasmanians were suffering from "slow strangulation of the mind" and would have died out anyway'.²⁴ L. Lloyd Robson and Michael Roe explain that in fact, the Tasmanian Aborigines were induced to trust George Augustus Robinson and were sent to Flinders Island, which they describe as 'a sort of concentration camp where most of them perished'. They conclude that

the Aborigines were victims of government indifference and confusion of aims. As well, the ravages of pulmonary diseases reduced their numbers so much that by 1837 there were probably not enough left to recover and establish a population on their own.²⁵

In *The Hunter*, the similarities between the colonisation of thylacines and of Tasmanian Aborigines are made explicit. M finds 'a ring of blackened stones and he imagines that they might have been laid by the local Aboriginal people, in the years before, they, the full-bloods, were almost driven to extinction'(57). He then immediately observes that

²³ Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 184, 207.

²⁴ Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 1, 2.

²⁵ L. Lloyd Robson and Michael Roe, *A Short History of Tasmania* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12, 13, 34.

the government had once tried to make another island, De Witt, an Aboriginal sanctuary – anything to redress their embarrassing demise. It was a tiny and forbidding rock of a place, shunned by all. And, naturally, the experiment failed. Then in 1936 ... it was again suggested that De Witt Island could be put to use – any tigers to be rounded up and sent away. (57)

In practice, no more thylacines were ever found to send there. However, like the Aboriginal ‘sanctuaries’ on Flinders and De Witt Islands, a thylacine one on De Witt would entail no sacrifice on the part of new settlers (who had occasioned the threat): on the contrary, the island was a place where no one wanted to live. Guiler describes De Witt as ‘a miserable place ... which has no suitable habitat and very little prey for thylacines’. The inadequacies of such islands as sanctuaries, human or animal, suggest that they might really have been oubliettes, in which ‘primitive’ native groups, supposedly destined for extinction, might be put out of the way until they met with it.

Despite the disappearance of thylacines, Eric Guiler writes in the conclusion to his book, ‘at all times and in spite of many dissenters I assume that the thylacine still exists’.²⁶ This remote possibility forms the central premise of *The Hunter*: in the novel, the species has survived out of the sight of humans, slowly dwindling until apparently only one, a female, remains. This constitutes a fictional re-presentation of history, both in the sense of retelling exemplified by *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and in the sense that Leigh resituates an historical event in the present. The effects of this resonate with Lydia Wevers’ observation that the incorporation of historical detail into fiction has the ‘effect of validating the novel’s claim to truth by palpably connecting it to truths’.²⁷ In *The Hunter*, the narrative’s appearance of flowing out of accepted history certainly contributes to its verisimilitude; it is not *quite* impossible. Indeed, the survival of thylacines, undetected for decades, foregrounds the limitations of human knowledge and therefore of accepted history. In these respects, the novel makes similar points to *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*. However, M’s view that ‘there is always new history to be made’ (37) suggests a belief that in causing extinctions for the biotechnology company, he personally shapes history. Because he proceeds to achieve this,

²⁶ Guiler, *Thylacine*, 30, 185.

²⁷ Lydia Wevers. ‘The Fact of the Matter: History, Narrative and Record in *The Singing Whakapapa* and *Tasman's Lay*,’ *The Literary Criterion* 33,1(1998), 49.

The Hunter does not provide a more optimistic version of events than the historical record; on the contrary, it resituates them only to repeat them.

The re-presentation of the thylacine's extinction foregrounds the continued relevance of imperialism and science to contemporary human-animal relations, and the survival of the relative power relations of those discourses. Here, like *Disgrace* and *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *The Hunter* stages a struggle between the rationalist and the compassionate. On one side of this struggle, the humanist attempt to master nature and the imperialistic desire for international conquest persist in contemporary versions, despite the emergence of posthumanist ideas and Australia's increasing independence from the British Empire since the disappearance of thylacines. In *The Hunter*, technological posthumanism (in which humans are seen as interrelated with technology) results, as N. Katherine Hayles warns that it can, in technohumanism, in which humanist subjectivity is prolonged by technology. Even if this does not mean literally downloading human consciousness into a computer as in Hayles's example from Moravec,²⁸ technology serves to confirm M's belief in human superiority and to empower him in his exploitations of other animals. Imperialism also survives here in that M's task is connected to globalisation. Although he rejects the view that 'globalization is simply recolonization', Bill Ashcroft argues that because both globalisation and Western imperialism are 'grounded in systems of domination that emerged from, and characterize, European modernity', 'Globalization is the radical *transformation* of imperialism, continually reconstituted'.²⁹ In *The Hunter*, anthropocentrism, globalisation and technology are united in M's work for the biotechnology company.

M himself has the advantages of the latest high-tech equipment, including guns and titanium traps custom-made to his own design (56). He also has plastic 'superskin' to protect his heels from blisters (33), and a night vision headset, which so changes his vision that 'he ... might even be a star-creature himself, with alien eyes' (51). Thus, technology physically improves the human body not just in terms of weaponry but also resilience and perception. Indeed, the last image of M as a 'star-creature' might be read as an example of technohumanism, in that the technology affects at least M's perceptions of the boundaries of

²⁸ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 287.

²⁹ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 208, 213.

his humanity, yet by enhancing rather than undermining his sense of superiority to other species and potentially advancing the anthropocentric purpose of his hunt.

Indeed, the company's relation to other species matches Val Plumwood's definition of 'instrumentalism with respect to nature' as 'use of an earth other which treats it as ... one whose being creates no limits on use and which can be entirely shaped to ends not its own'.³⁰ The biotechnology company echoes the destructive desire on the part of international scientists to possess specimens of rare animals, not regardless of but *because* of their rarity, like Pitford in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and like the collectors of thylacines described by Owens. However, the biotechnology company seems even more instrumentalist in that it does not even appear to regard its acquisitions with fascination: they are no more than resources. M reflects, 'Inbred thylacine, dodo, moa, mammoth, bunyip, yeti ... mutations all, this was now the stuff that dreams – and wars – were made of' (50). The company's objective is to access rare animals' genetic material to gain the upper hand in an international arms race.

[B]y studying one hair from a museum's stuffed pup, the developers of biological weapons were able to model a genetic picture of the thylacine, a picture so beautiful, so heavenly, that it was declared capable of winning a thousand wars. Whether it will be a virus or antidote, M does not know, cannot know and does not want to know, but there is no question the race is on to harvest the beast. (40)

In killing the thylacine, the company also ignores any other value that she might have. In terms of conservation, she might offer an invaluable resource; although *The Hunter* does not include any reference it, the Thylacine Genome Project (1999-2005) sought to map and replicate the species' genetic code, but had only fragmented 'ancient DNA' (from preserved specimens) to work with. Genetic analyst Karen Firestone commented in an interview, 'If someone found a living breathing thylacine... that would help a lot'.³¹ A living thylacine would also have considerable cultural value. Even in its absence, the thylacine species is so significant that there are quarrels over its very image. Owen describes an attempt by Aborigines in 2002 'to claim copyright over native animal images – particularly the thylacine, emu, platypus and kangaroo – as sacred symbols'. He cites Rodney Dillon's assertion that 'These native animals are part of our people and it is an insult the way they are being used ...

³⁰ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 142.

³¹ Karen Firestone, interview by Bryndis Snaebjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, *Big Mouth* (Glasgow: Tramway and Carlisle: Cumbria Institute of the Arts, 2004), 67.

They steal our land and they steal our animals and then use them as their signs'.³² If Aborigines regard this as an instance of ongoing domination, the appropriation of the last remaining thylacine by an international company would surely constitute a very serious theft. For the biotechnology corporation, however, the value of the species' survival is outweighed by the risk of enemy companies accessing the resources it represents; as M is well aware, he is both 'sampler and ensurer of exclusivity' (50). Thus, in technologically enhancing the human, reducing the thylacine to a resource and disregarding other humans' conservationist and local cultural values, M's work for the biotechnology company illustrates the survival of anthropocentrism within technological posthumanism and of imperialism within globalisation.³³

On the other side of the struggle over the thylacine are the environmentalists whom M meets while he is based with Lucy Armstrong. They believe he is monitoring Tasmanian devils,³⁴ and so never oppose him directly. They arrive not because of the thylacine but for a folk festival, and even the two who stay to tag the thylacine for National Parks never realise that M is her enemy. However, their objectives echo those of Clive Lord and his colleagues in the context of contemporary conflicts and philosophies, and they are therefore M's ideological opponents. They participate in campaigns against the construction of roads through Tasmania's ancient-growth Tarkine Forest (10, 106),³⁵ and later, two of them are employed to tag the thylacine for National Parks so that she can be monitored and protected.

³² Owen, *Thylacine*, 166-67; Rodney Dillon, *The Mercury*, 31 January 2002, in Owen, 167. See also Andrew Probyn, 'The roo is taboo, Australians told; Suit claims copyright on native animals,' *Herald Sun*, 1 January 2002, www.williams.edu/AnthSoc/native/rooemu.htm, and 'Aborigines take roo, emu to court,' *The Australian*, 30 January 2002, www.williams.edu/AnthSoc/native/rooemu.htm.

³³ Ironically, Leigh has also been accused of appropriating the local in writing *The Hunter*. Owen notes, particularly in Tasmania, Sydney-based Leigh's use of the state was thought by some to be both gratuitous and inaccurate... It led to a debate, still unresolved, about the appropriation in fiction of a place with which an author is but passingly familiar.

Owen, *Thylacine*, 175-76.

³⁴ There is no specific reason given; this could be a reference to the outbreak of Devil Facial Tumour Disease, but that issue was not publicised until 2003. See David Owen and David Pemberton, *Tasmanian Devil: A Unique and Threatened Animal* (London: The Natural History Museum, 2005).

³⁵ Owen explains that the plan was to build a road through the forest from Smithton to the mining town of Zeehan. 'Promoted by the government as a future tourist enhancement, it was dubbed by conservationists "the road to nowhere". Its opponents said it was being built solely in the interests of forestry and mining companies'. Owen, *Thylacine*, 159. Construction of this road was completed in 1996, and another road threatened in 1997. This conflict was also associated with thylacines when 'A direct action group, the Tarkine Tigers, came into existence ... which took the thylacine as its symbol.' Owen, *Thylacine*, 160. See also World Wildlife Fund Australia, 'Tarkine Conservation Timeline,' <http://wwf.org.au/ourwork/land/tarkinetimeline/>; The Wilderness Society, 'Tarkine Road to Nowhere,' http://www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/forests/tasmania/tarkine/19970914_mr/.

However, only Lucy Armstrong's husband Jarrah seems to offer a positive model of environmentalism. He apparently espoused an ecological version of what I am calling species posthumanism: a sentence in his book reads, 'At a time when the planet is so overrun with man, is it really so unfeasible to question whose life is more ...' (108). The missing word presumably has to do with value, suggesting that Jarrah saw humans not only as one species among many, but also as less important than other, less numerous species. Jarrah is no longer around to model this, however. Foul play is a possibility: at the pub, M is told that 'greenies' are unwelcome, "unless you want to join your mate Jarrah" (63); alternatively, the biotechnology company may have eliminated him, since it appears Jarrah was the one to make the confirmed sighting of the thylacine (according to his son Bike (78-79)). His surviving friends also model alternatives to M's anthropocentric relation to nature, but they seem to fulfil negative 'greenie' stereotypes in ways that ironically seem to hinder species posthumanism.

One such stereotype is the feminisation of environmentalism. To some extent, the narrative of *The Hunter* perpetuates this gendering. Plumwood observes that ecofeminist utopias are often imagined as 'surviving against the hostile intent of men, who control a world of ... military and technological might ... where power ... means domination of both nature and people'.³⁶ From this perspective, M's pursuit of the female thylacine for technological and military reasons makes him an ecofeminist villain. This can also be seen as a rejection of the sexism of humanism's privileging of the masculine in the construction and of course the designation of the figure of 'man'. However, the novel also appears to present ecofeminism as maintaining unhelpful binaries, impeding the repositioning of *all* humans in relation to nature (as advocated by Jarrah) by often failing to present positive alternatives to the destructive masculinity it indicts. Even Plumwood, who states that her ecofeminism-derived 'relational selfhood' is equally practicable by men, and acknowledges that the virtues of 'respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship and responsibility' have

³⁶ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 7. The thylacine's female sex could also be read as a feminist revision of the popular belief that the last thylacine was a male called Benjamin, a point which Paddle has since drawn into question. He suggests that perhaps 'the reason for the ready acceptance of the Benjamin story lies in its resonance with patriarchal scientific assumptions'. Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 201. Paddle's book came out a year after *The Hunter*, but the gender of Leigh's thylacine could still be read as a retelling of this accepted history.

been *constructed* as feminine,³⁷ offers little discussion of how they *are* practiced by men. Leigh's use of her environmentalist characters makes this point. In his role as caring father and naturalist, Jarrah exemplifies the sort of masculine connection to others that Plumwood means to promote, and to which even M might have been able to relate. However, as Richard Kerridge suggests, the absent Jarrah 'signifies the lost possibility of a different sort of masculinity to M's'.³⁸ Instead, a character called Free, a male heterosexual cross-dresser, seems to be a parody of the stereotype of the effeminate environmentalist which ecofeminist discourse can perpetuate. M is disconcerted by this: 'he falters when the front door opens and a berry-brown man in a green velvet dress walks out' (103). This shows how the construction of environmentalism as feminine is alienating to some men and is thus counterproductive to its widespread adoption.

Indeed, *The Hunter* is wary of contemporary environmentalist philosophies even where they are not gendered. Although Jarrah's view exemplifies what I am calling species posthumanism, the other environmentalists, like Free in his cross-dressing, seem more stereotypical. During a fireside conversation, M overhears their interpretation of Jarrah's idealism:

Jarrah Armstrong had it right: energy and matter, that's what it's all about. No beginnings and no ends... Dust to dust, my fine friend, and dust is earth and earth is beautiful, and the rest, the real thing, that goes on too.

Hallelujah, brother, yeah, I'm going to live forever... (107)

These characters, whom M calls 'the immortals', are expressing something very like the 'indistinguishability account', in which, Plumwood explains, some deep ecologists embrace a cosmic view in which 'the self is merged with the other'. This would also amount to species posthumanism, if the blurring of boundaries between humans and other species is understood to contradict the humanist assumption that humans are a privileged species. However, Plumwood points out that the indistinguishability account does not necessarily do this, because 'The analysis of humans as metaphysically unified with the cosmic whole will be equally true whatever relation humans stand in with nature'.³⁹ *The Hunter* foregrounds this

³⁷ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 172-3.

³⁸ Richard Kerridge, 'Narratives of Resignation: Environmentalism in Recent Fiction,' in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. John Parham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 98.

³⁹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 177, 177-8.

difficulty when M, on hearing the immortals, wonders, 'If everything is transformed then what is extinction?'(107). According to the indistinguishability account, extinction might have no meaning. Perhaps this explains why these 'immortals' seem so unconcerned to find the thylacine for National Parks; instead, they fulfil yet another stereotype: that of the ineffectual, drug-using environmentalist. M finds them in the thylacine's territory smoking marijuana and concludes that 'they haven't been searching for the tiger at all, and have instead been ... doing the absolute minimum they can get away with' (151).

In *The Hunter*, then, Leigh arguably uses the scenario of a surviving thylacine to demonstrate a lack of change in human attitudes to animals and conservation, the persistence of appropriative international attitudes to Australia and the failure of local resistance to them. Yet as Kerridge observes, 'Because the environmentalist viewpoint is so crushingly absent from this narrative perspective, environmentalism has a paradoxical, implied emphasis, powerful as a ghostly presence but entirely thwarted and unspoken'.⁴⁰ Indeed, I would suggest that the limitation of the third-person narrative to M's perspective also functions as an instance of the postcolonial irony described by Linda Hutcheon, in which the ironist (the author) adopts a dominant voice in order to subvert it from within.⁴¹ In *Disgrace*, as Gayatri Spivak points out, the relentless focus on Lurie encourages the reader to pay attention to Lucy's opinions.⁴² In *The Hunter*, the enduring power of imperialism and anthropocentrism, the narrative concentration on M and the presentation of the environmentalists as inadequate all have a similar effect: they work to heighten the reader's sensitivity and perhaps receptivity to the underrepresented perspectives. Meanwhile, a more positive relation to animals begins to emerge from the unlikely quarter of M himself.

Hunterly empathy

Inverting the effect of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *The Hunter* conveys the tragedy but not the scale of extinction, presenting it as intimately as possible through a single animal. Here, Greg Garrard's concerns about the representation of extinction, which I mentioned in the previous chapter, again come into play (indeed, it is in relation to *The Hunter* that he raises them): he

⁴⁰ Kerridge, 'Narratives of Resignation', 97.

⁴¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), vii.

⁴² Gayatri Spivak, 'Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching,' *Diacritics* 32, 3-4 (2002).

considers that it is difficult to represent the species-wide phenomenon of extinction within novels because the genre is an individualising one.⁴³ As discussed in the previous chapter, Farrell negotiates extinction by representing it from a distance, presenting only the antecedents to it and using retrospective irony to provide an ecocentric view from outside the main story. But in *The Hunter*, where there is only one animal involved, extinction figures in the very individualising or biocentric terms of which Garrard is critical. However, Val Plumwood considers that

environmental ethics needs a different and richer understanding of ethics, one which ... allows for ethical concepts owing to emotionality and particularity, and abandons the exclusive focus on the universal and the abstract ... and the dualistic and oppositional accounts of the reason/emotion and universal/particular contrasts given in rationalist accounts of ethics.⁴⁴

In *The Hunter*, the distinction between particular animal and general species is disrupted for the reader and for M because the thylacine is the last of her kind. The use of what might be termed synecdoche allows Leigh to negotiate – or perhaps evade – the problem of individualism; the species is not just represented but embodied by a single animal. Thus, inverting the effect of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Leigh conveys the tragedy but not the scale of extinction. This tragedy is both underscored and intensified by its intimate representation through M. Although the thylacine species is already doomed, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that he will kill the last one. In this section, I suggest that this depends on whether rationalism or empathy prevails not in the external struggle between M and the unsuspecting environmentalists, but in M's internal struggle between opposing impulses.

In his examination of hunting in *Killing Animals*, Garry Marvin writes that 'A fundamental difference between hunting for food and hunting as sport lies in the nature of the contest between the hunters and the hunted'. Whereas 'A person hunting for food ... does all in his or her power to minimize the nature of that contest', for a sports hunter, 'contest is deliberately sought out and elaborated.'⁴⁵ This distinction is blurred in *The Hunter*. As the biotechnology company's professional hunter, M needs to be as efficient as possible and has

⁴³ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 157-58.

⁴⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 184

⁴⁵ Garry Marvin, 'Wild Killing: Contesting the Animal in Hunting', in *Killing Animals*, ed. The Animal Studies Group (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 19.

the advantages of military training and high tech equipment. However, he obviously enjoys hunting for its own sake as well. Kerridge comments that in *The Hunter*, 'The highly contemporary theme of biopiracy ... combines with spy-thriller elements and the traditional format of the Hemingwayesque hunting story'.⁴⁶ Like several of Hemingway's protagonists, M pits himself against the natural world, finding his sense of purpose in the notion of human superiority and even regarding nonhuman extinctions as the natural result of that superiority:

What must the plateau have been like before? Ragged and jagged, teeming with animals, giant fauna now extinct... But it was not, he knows, the last Ice Age that had killed them... What had made the last one different was a two-legged fearsome little pygmy, the human hunter: a testimony to cunning, to mind over matter... What he is doing is what his ancestors have always done, and done well. (30-31)⁴⁷

This perspective seems to extend the notion that some species are doomed by their inferiority to include potentially all nonhuman animals. Moreover, M is concentrating on ways in which human agency has been central to the shaping of history and obviously regards this as a source of inspiration and affirmation for his own work. In both respects, then, M's view of his hunting can be read as a particularly anthropocentric instance of humanism. However, his relation to other species is in fact much more complex than he wants to believe: it becomes clear that he has a considerable capacity to empathise with his own prey.

In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood advocates an ecological ethics based on virtue, which, she explains, 'expresses what the individual *wants* to do ... rather than what he or she is constrained to do through duty'. She suggests that

Were the use of such a virtue-based account to be explicitly admitted by deep ecology, it would be unnecessary to incur the many problems of Self-interest, especially the denial of difference, in order to find a basis for consideration of others in nature which flows from the self and is not based on prohibition.

What Plumwood is putting forward here can be interpreted as a version of what I have been calling species posthumanism, in which humans are regarded as interconnected with but not

⁴⁶ Kerridge, 'Narratives of Resignation', 97-98

⁴⁷ Paddle writes, 'The demands of human predation, accompanying an increasing human population, caused the complete disappearance of the previous ecological balance and the decimation of whole prey species. Aboriginal artefacts, stone tools and hand axes dated at slightly more than 30,000 years have recently been identified as possessing traces of blood and been found in association with the bones of megafaunal ... species'. Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 18.

indistinguishable from other animals. She writes, 'With nature, as with the human sphere, the capacity to care, to experience sympathy, understanding and sensitivity to the situation and fate of particular others is an index of our moral being'.⁴⁸

Somewhat paradoxically, many of these capacities are features of what I call M's 'hunterly empathy', which develops out of a style of hunting which Marvin calls 'hunting by disguise'. Here, the distance between human and animal that is present in 'hunting by disturbance' is closed: 'Although the hunter does not in any way cease to be human, he or she must adopt the ways of a wild animal... The hunter must disguise or camouflage the human shape and presence ... to blend into the environment, to become one with it'.⁴⁹ This is just what M does when he arrives on the plateau to hunt the thylacine, smearing himself with wombat and wallaby droppings 'until he is not quite human, a strange but not entirely unfamiliar beast' (30). M is not trying to liberate his own animality here. Instead, as Marvin writes, 'understanding and skill based on sight, hearing, and smell is instinctual to the animal, part of its repertoire for survival, and the human must become equally adept in using such senses when hunting'.⁵⁰ M understands this as becoming

the natural man, the man who can see and hear and smell what other men cannot; the man of delicate touch and sinuous movement; the man who can find his way through the bush by day and night, and sit motionless through the long hours with his finger married to the trigger. (58)⁵¹

Here, M cultivates the same heightened sensory awareness that Allbones displays in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* (although Allbones seems less conscious that his abilities are unusual); in both cases, then, hunting is facilitated not by pretending to be other than human, but, as Marvin suggests, by relying on the same abilities as the animal prey.

However, M adds to this another technique that brings him emotionally closer to the thylacine: imagination. He reasons, 'If I have imagined you here ... then here I should set my snares. My imagination is my companion, my man who does the hard yards and reports back

⁴⁸ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 183, 185.

⁴⁹ Marvin, 'Wild Killing', 24.

⁵⁰ Marvin, 'Wild Killing', 24.

⁵¹ This image of the trigger as wedding band can be seen to reflect M's priorities: as I argue below, hunting is generally much more important to him than human-human relationships, including romantic ones.

what he has seen' (55).⁵² Later, he is encouraged by the mental image of 'a thylacine... black stripes huddled over one of his traps: caught' (95). This opens up a less rational, more empathic relation to his prey. He finds himself wondering, 'Has she ... descended to picking at carrion? Is her striped and honeyed coat short and dense like that of a Doberman's, or has it fallen to maggot-ridden mange?' (66). He is quick to stem this train of thought, aware that it diminishes what Marvin terms the contest of hunting:

This ignoble image of his prey discourages M and he immediately sets about to rectify it: Yes, there is virtue in being a survivor. The last tiger must be wary, she must be strong, she must be crafty and ruthless and wise. And if the mutation has endowed her with any new qualities, they must be qualities which enhance, not detract from, the inescapable drive to survive. (66)

At other times, his imagination of the thylacine also goes beyond what is realistic. Laying sheep offal as bait, he thinks:

Do you remember, tiger, when you were young and used to follow your mother down the escarpment onto the verdant plains? ...Ah, perhaps you were so young then you had not been born, had only savoured the sheep ... through your mother's blood, through her mother's blood. (48)

As it does on several occasions, M's train of thought here takes the form of a direct address to the thylacine, casting her as his interlocutor; indeed, he thinks of it as a dialogue. Perhaps this helps him to convince himself of her reality or proximity (it might also be seen to emphasise that his life is defined not by other people but by his relationships with his prey), but as he realises himself, it does not make the real animal more likely to appear:

He stops himself: this dialogue with the tiger is no good. The animal does not care for talk, or for history or for what passes as history. If the food is there and she is hungry, then she will eat. (48)

These sorts of self-corrections suggest that, like Pi's father in *Life of Pi*, M is wary of '*Animalus anthropomorphicus*'. From this perspective, Philo and Wilbert explain, anthropomorphism 'is to misrepresent [animals]' quite different "true nature", and thus to

⁵² This could be a reference to J.M. Coetzee's Nobel Prize lecture, 'He and His Man'. There, the 'man' of the title is Crusoe's man, Defoe, who reports to Crusoe but who is, it turns out, a figment of his imagination. M's man is the imagination who goes looking for the thylacine and reports her position. J.M. Coetzee, 'He and His Man' (Nobel Lecture presented at the Swedish Academy, Stockholm, 7 December 2003), http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture-e.html.

foster woeful misunderstandings of what they, the animals, are really about'.⁵³ Because M regards his fantasies as irrelevant to the hunt, he must therefore assume, as Pi does, that other species are 'essentially and practically removed from us'. Yet M keeps having these fantasies and sometimes forgets to stop himself, as is the case when he wonders if she has her own mythology: 'The tiger, he wonders, when she sees the stars, does she push them into animal shapes, give them names, and then pull them down from the sky so that she can eat them, make them part of her?' (51). What this pattern suggests is that although M is using his imagination as a hunting tool, it is not always within his control. This becomes increasingly clear as M crosses the boundary in the other direction: he 'zoomorphises' himself.

On two occasions, M deliberately imagines himself into a thylacine body. One night as he is falling asleep,

he performs his favourite trick: he changes shape, swallows the beast. The eyes in his head are no longer his own, short thick fur runs along the back of his neck, and his spine grows thick and strong, right out of his back, out into a long stiff tail. He hangs his body off this strong spine, hollows out his belly, shrinks his gangly limbs. His arm is bent at the elbow, and a paw, not a hand, rests against his bony convex chest. (91)

Later, while fully awake, 'to reacquaint himself with the tiger he gets down on his knees and crawls along an open pad with his jaw dropped wide until his rough palms begin to smart'

(148). These 'embodiments' of the thylacine resonate with Rane Willerslev's discussion of the 'perspectivist' and mimetic hunting practices of the Yukaghir people of Siberia.

Perspectivism, he explains, is the idea that 'different species see things in similar or identical ways to humans, but what they see is different and depends on the body they have'. While the underlying soul remains the same, it can move between bodies and perspectives.

Willerslev suggests that the Yukaghirs put this into practice through 'mimetic' hunting:

what Yukaghirs strive for when transforming their bodies into the image of prey is ... to assume the point of view of the animal, while in some profound sense remaining the same. Mimetic practice ... grants the hunter a 'double perspective' whereby he can

⁵³ Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, eds. 'Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: An Introduction,' in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 19.

assume the animal's point of view but still remain a human hunter who chases and kills the prey.⁵⁴

M's self-animalisation seems very similar to this: in his imagined assumption of a thylacine body, he is apparently trying access the perspective of his prey by positioning himself between species. However, through his mimetic hunting, the boundaries between himself and his prey also become disrupted in ways that he does not intend.

M's psychological state appears to become less rational as he becomes more attuned to the thylacine. He is already susceptible to paranoia, in part because of his involvement in the biotechnological arms race.⁵⁵ However, his nervousness also seems to be a side effect of his imagined entry into the subjectivity of the thylacine. M has a recurring nightmare (apparently since before this particular assignment) in which he dreams of being hunted:

does she have the same dream he has, the only dream he has...the running dream, where he is being chased for hours by an unknown foe ... where, finally, he knows he will be caught and that capture means a blank death. (45)

This nightmare seems to resonate with Willerslev's explanation of the risks of mimetic hunting: according to the Yukaghirs, 'If [a hunter] allows his intentions to merge with his bodily movements (which are that of an elk), he will surrender to the perspective of prey and turn into it'.⁵⁶ This may be what is happening to M. It is as if, in his career as hunter, he has become so sensitised to animals as a deliberate part of his hunting that he also involuntarily assumes their position in his dreams, *as* his prey. He even develops waking fears of role-reversal:

he wonders if she is leading him into some trap of her own. Would a tiger kill a man? ... not that he knows of, but it is possible: if she was crazed, she could lure him into

⁵⁴ Rane Willerslev, 'Not Animal, Not *Not-Animal*: Hunting, Imitation and Empathetic Knowledge among the Siberian Yukaghirs,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10, 3 (2004), 630.

⁵⁵ He is bothered that he has been sent on a solo mission and billeted with the unreliable Lucy because it reminds him that he is expendable to the biotechnology company. When he injures his head in a fall and Free asks, "Did they get at you, man?", M's first thought is 'Who?' (103). Free must suspect the local loggers, if anyone, but M is probably afraid of enemy agents.

⁵⁶ Willerslev, 'Not Animal, Not *Not-Animal*', 639.

some secret spot and then ... launch herself at his throat. (116)⁵⁷

M's paranoia suggests that his understanding of what it is like to be prey extends beyond his control, so that in a psychological if not a literal sense, the hunter has become the hunted.

Over the course of M's hunt for the thylacine, then, the distinction between enmity and empathy begins to dissolve. M does not believe in the conservation or the cultural value of other animals: he thinks of human superiority and the human extermination of other species as natural. Yet his understanding of and sensitivity to the situation of the thylacine are qualities that Plumwood advocates as means of relating to both human and nonhuman others. Moreover, although he is trying to use this empathy as a hunting tool, it also seems to cause him to identify with the thylacine, to the point that he experiences fear of becoming prey. Thus, like David Lurie's growing attention to animals in *Disgrace*, Pi's wonder at them in *Life of Pi* and their unpredictability in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, M's experience of hunting the thylacine works to undermine humanist notions of the human subject as rational. M never consciously questions such beliefs, but his growing empathy with the thylacine has parallels with Lurie's involuntary empathy with the dogs and sheep. Just as Pi believes, imagination is necessary in order for M to comprehend animals, especially an animal that, like the meerkats on Pi's floating island, seems almost impossible. Yet for all the intimacy with the thylacine that M experiences on his side of the hunt, the thylacine, like the rabbits, mustelids and birds of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, remains unpredictable and elusive. Indeed, for a time, it seems likely that M will redirect his ability to empathise towards developing positive relationships with other humans, and forget all about her.

Familial alternatives

As Kerridge suggests, M's growing desire for family life among the Armstrongs, with whom he is lodging on Tasmania, offers an alternative destiny for him, both in ecofeminist terms (which is what Kerridge is referring to) and, I suggest, in terms of his relation to place, as he almost settles in Tasmania. Leigh implies that one reason for M's initial dedication to hunting

⁵⁷ Guiler writes that 'The general picture of the thylacine is of a docile creature which does not attack people, even under provocation, and this view was held by those trappers I interviewed'. Guiler, *Thylacine*, 126. According to Paddle, 'It can be concluded that occasional acts of predation were carried out against both Aborigines and Europeans, with a probably preference, associated with a greater degree of success, for the juvenile members of the species rather than adults. More usually, humans were left alone'. M may be right that the thylacine is curious, however: 'Some thylacines were obviously attracted to humans and often followed them in the bush'. Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 93, 94.

is his lack of dedication to anything or anyone else. He is 'anchored by neither wife nor home, nor by a lover nor even a single friend' (15). He is estranged from his parents: 'It's been ... at least – what? ten years – and it occurs to M that his parents might in fact be dead, done away with. This placebo brings him a sudden and unexpected peace' (16). M also sees love as a liability. He has known men 'who wouldn't go on a job without their lucky love-struck spoon', and plans not to let himself fall in love: 'that's where those boys went wrong, they let it happen' (34). Instead of sentimental tokens, M carries coffee (25), and the tradition of human hunting provides him with 'the kind of comfort and satisfaction that another man might derive from leafing through a set of family photo albums' (31). Indeed, he derives his sense of his centrality to history from participating in the destruction of animal species:

now the trappers themselves were near extinct, one or two perhaps whiling away their nursing-home days in a fog of pleasant fantasies... There is a symmetry to this that pleases M, a peculiar aesthetic, and that he is a part of it, and knows it, only makes the pleasure more exquisite. (38)

This, then, is the closest M comes to the immortals' sense of sharing in the cycle of energy and matter. He lacks what Plumwood calls relational identity, in which

the individual fulfils his or her own ends as well as those of the other... He or she stands in particular relations, which may be those of care, custodianship, friendship, or various virtue concepts, to that other, who is treated as deserving of concern for its own sake, and hence as intrinsically worthy or valuable.⁵⁸

Of course, this means that M is also anchorless in a geographical and cultural sense. He has none of the attachment to place that the environmentalists, for instance, demonstrate in their attempts to defend the Tarkine Forest. M very much belongs to the sort of globalised world described by Zygmunt Bauman, who writes, 'The deepest meaning conveyed by the idea of globalization is that of the indeterminate, unruly and self-propelled character of world affairs; the absence of a centre, of a controlling desk, of a board of directors, of a managerial office'.⁵⁹ Even the biotechnology corporation may have no single headquarters; it is described as a 'multinational' and there is certainly never any indication of its location. The result of inhabiting this world is that M himself is global and globalising, willing to go

⁵⁸ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 185.

⁵⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 59.

anywhere and to appropriate the natural resources of any location. However, Kerridge observes that ‘We are made to feel that a relatively slight tilt of the scale, at some point, a slight difference in M’s chemical, emotional, or intellectual balance, might have been all that was required for a different outcome’.⁶⁰

M’s relationship with the Armstrongs is a good example of this. As I suggested earlier, Jarrah models a masculine example of relational identity, with both his family and other animals, and M is attracted to the idea of filling this role in relation to his widow, Lucy, and her children, Sass and Bike. At first, this seems an unlikely possibility. Lucy is taking sleeping pills to cope with the loss of Jarrah, and she is affiliated with environmentalism and conservation. M is on a mission to exterminate a species, and at first he values the family only insofar as they are conducive to it, humouring Sass because ‘Anything that will make her more agreeable to my demands is to be encouraged’ (22). However, the longer he knows the children, the more personal and genuine their relationships become, as M directs his ability to empathise towards fostering human connections instead of killing animals. He tries to make amends when he realises that Sass considers him untrustworthy, and they develop ‘the kind of wary intimacy to be found amongst old friends who have in the past betrayed one another’ (71). He is forced to relate to her younger brother when Bike tries to follow him into the bush and becomes upset. ‘He slips off his pack and takes the boy in his arms – anything to calm him down. How tiny he is, and how warm’ (110). Later, he voluntarily takes Bike for a drive, letting him steer (122). Thus, M develops real relationships with both children. The idea of a relationship between Lucy and M is planted when, disoriented, she mistakes him for Jarrah (60-61), and as she recovers, they exhibit increasing attraction towards one another. He decides that ‘he will resist it until the job is over’ (85). However, he is already distracted; just as he is unable to escape his irrational thoughts about the thylacine, M now finds his hunting infiltrated by the emotional ties that he is beginning to develop, an early indication that the new future he is imagining is incompatible with his present life.

Here, Leigh plays with the stereotypical associations between women and nature, as M first repeats and then rejects them. Inspired by a snow-daisy, M begins to reflect on romance and then conflates this with the hunt, echoing traditional metaphors of the hunt as romance, or of romance as hunting. ‘Yes, he is romancing his prey. This thought rankles him a little,

⁶⁰ Kerridge, ‘Narratives of Resignation’, 99

because at heart he knows he is only hunting, but for entertainment's sake he lets it run' (90). He pretends the thylacine is a woman, and that they are in 'those first few heady days of romance, when he has already bedded the girl, whispered in her ear, sent her roses... He has confessed his jealousy, watched her soften before him ... but not quite give herself over' (90). This romantic fantasy is not necessarily incompatible with hunting to kill. Matt Cartmill observes, 'This motif crops up again and again throughout the literature of hunting: many hunters deeply and sincerely love the animals they kill, and they identify that love as one of their reasons for wanting to kill them'. Cartmill's interpretation of this is that 'hunting is often entangled with something dark, violent and irrational in the human psyche, whatever the source of that darkness may ultimately prove to be'.⁶¹ Of course, hunting is also used as a metaphor for romance; in *Disgrace*, David Lurie applies the motif this way around where he conceptualises his relationships with Soraya and Melanie in terms of animal predation. M, however, quickly dispenses with his anthropomorphic metaphor: 'This nostalgia for seduction is seductive itself. And it's delusory. The animal is no woman. He will not win it over with sweet words, wine and roses' (90). Thus, trying to reassert his belief in a fundamental distinction between humans and animals, M returns to the view of anthropomorphism as misleading as to the thylacine's real nature (which in this case, indeed, seems likely). However, M's increasing anthropomorphism is again an indication that his relational impulses, this time in connection to humans, are becoming increasingly influential and are now taking priority over the hunt. The more the hunt seems doomed to failure, the more receptive he becomes to such impulses.

Marvin writes that 'Possible and actual failure, both in terms of failing to find a suitable animal and failing to kill that animal when it is found, is essential to sports hunting'.⁶² Of course, in terms of professional hunting like M's, where expediency as well as the contest is important, an unsuccessful hunt also means failing his employer. As I suggested above, M has coped with disappointed personal relationships in the past by immersing himself in his hunting; now, as he begins to struggle with the hunt, this pattern inverts. Although he finds evidence of the thylacine's presence, his prized precision does not always outweigh the factor of luck, and when he starts to feel thwarted, he seeks comfort in other people. An example of

⁶¹ Matt Cartmill, *A View to Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History*. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 238, 239.

⁶² Marvin, 'Wild Killing', 25.

this occurs when he falls from a rock face, and lies on a ledge slipping in and out of consciousness. Just as his amorous desires became conflated with the hunt earlier, his filial longings do now, as he dreams of his mother and the thylacine. He thinks that ‘the rock is his mother’s soft and warm bosom; he can smell her’ (96). Then,

he thinks he sees the tiger ... and then he watches as she slouches toward him, curious ... until she is so close he can feel her warm breath on his cheek. But her breath is sweet, and she does not guzzle at his throat, and that is when he realises he must be dreaming, or hallucinating. (97)

Finally, he has a dreaming memory of his mother telling him “time to go” (97). The appearance of his mother as well as the thylacine in these hallucinations implies the resurfacing of the emotional yearnings that he has tried to suppress beneath his hunter’s purpose. On his next trip to the plateau, despite actually glimpsing the thylacine, he misses his shot and loses her tracks in the rain. At this, his rational control over his emotions disappears: ‘he gets down on his knees, one man on the plateau, and – speechless – holds his head between his hands... This time it seems he will fail... He thinks: I will cosset myself in failure’ (121).

On his return from the plateau, M is summoned to another job, and thus is no longer committed to killing the thylacine either personally or professionally. Instead, M suddenly acknowledges that he is not just attracted to Lucy but has real feelings for the whole family. When Lucy says that she will miss him, ‘A feeling of warmth, actual bodily warmth, flushes through his chest and he realises that he, too, will miss her, will miss them, and this feeling doesn’t leave him as he drives away’ (128). Here, then, M reaches the same point of conscious acknowledgement of his feelings that Lurie does in relation to the sheep and dogs in *Disgrace*; in M’s case this concerns humans rather than other animals, but it is a similar mark of acceptance of the emotional over the rational. After his (undocumented) eight weeks away, it becomes apparent that he has finally developed an anchor in the Armstrong family as he voluntarily returns to Tasmania. Worrying that Lucy might not like the chocolate he has bought, M realises ‘he wants them to be happy to see him, as happy as he will be to see them. This is what makes him nervous, this loaded sense of anticipation’ (132). It is clear that at this point, M is hoping to give up his global existence with the biotechnology company and build a new, local identity; he tries to rationalise, but cannot resist the thought ‘that maybe

one day he might like to grow old on a farm, with loved ones around (loved ones!)’ (132). Ultimately, however, the novel explores how a hunter *remains* a hunter.

Extinction

Although the novel re-presents history in the sense that the thylacine species has survived into the present, Leigh cannot afford to offer any hope with regard to its future, or even the fate of the remaining animal. If M’s desire for family life were realised, the narrative might become one of a hunter redeemed, leaving his erstwhile prey alive and resulting in the kind of guarded optimism offered by *Disgrace*. Because extinction is inevitable, however, that story cannot be told. If there were, as M briefly imagines, ‘an entire tribe of tigers – so crafty that they have avoided the human gaze for years’ (118), the narrative would offer a degree of optimism which would imply complacency about human-animal relations. Indeed, even if the single thylacine managed to escape M, that might suggest that at least nature or conservation has enough power to protect her from anthropocentrism, even though extinction is a foregone conclusion. M’s success in killing her instead emphasises that the anthropocentric and colonising forces that brought about extinction in the 1930s are thriving in contemporary versions. Leigh foregrounds the tragic results of this through the intimate and emotional depiction of the thylacine’s death.

M reaches a point where he actively wants to become a father to the Armstrong family and stay in Tasmania, but is denied this and returns to his default role as the global and globalising hunter. His mistake, to the extent that this is his fault, is in taking the new eight-week mission from the biotechnology company, again deferring his emotional fulfilment. The narrative does not follow him on this mission, instead remaining firmly grounded in Tasmania, and thereby emphasising that M, by contrast, has prioritised the corporation’s globalising perspective over the local roots he was starting to put down. On his return, M finds these roots ripped out; the family is gone from Tasmania. An accident has left Sass in a special burns unit in Sydney, as a result of which Lucy has suffered a nervous breakdown, so Bike is to go into foster care. There is clearly an element of chance in this tragedy, but the dispersal of the family could perhaps have been avoided had M stayed. It is clear that his presence was having a positive effect on Lucy’s mental health, and if this prevented Sass’s accident or Lucy’s breakdown, then the life he wanted might have remained a possibility.

Instead, in what seems like a culmination of his waking and dreaming identification with his prey, M experiences his misery through images of a hunted thylacine's death: 'M has had his chest scooped out. His skin has been peeled from his body. He can dislocate his jaw and fill the universe with a stone-grey roar' (135). Ironically, it is this experience that eventually prompts M to kill the real thylacine after all.

From this point on, the narrative becomes an intensification of M's struggle between emotion and detachment, as, in a conceptual realisation of his nightmares, he is now continually prey to emotions which he tries to escape in his hunt. 'The escarpment beckons... He wishes he was there now, up where it was calm and pure, with space enough for a man to think' (139). However, 'he is not yet to the top of the escarpment before the lamentations begin. I have been forsaken, he thinks, the world conspires against me. I try, I try, and look what happens' (141). The Armstrongs haunt him. 'At night, lying on the hard ground, he is plagued by thoughts of the girl, Sass, now condemned to lying down, and of her mother, who knows no better' (142). He worries that Bike might suffer teasing at school and alienation within a foster family (152). In these moments, M's sensitivity to the situation of another, which has so often been a hunting tool, is working as Plumwood means it to, as a way of caring for that other, but now it makes him miserable. Therefore, 'To give himself some purpose, and not because he really has a purpose, he sets out to examine his traps and snares. What else can he do? There is no better option' (142). He becomes the detached hunter again:

He comes to think of his fondness for Lucy and the children as an aberration, a monumental lapse in judgement, and his vision of growing old and happy in a bluestone house seems to him near laughable... What he sees now is that he has been tested, steeled, and seduced, and that his true purpose is the one which he first set out to achieve: to be a hunter, to harvest the tiger. What else could it be? (147-48)

In this renewed conviction regarding his own identity, M again devotes himself to the hunt. However, even in the final stages and the aftermath of the hunt, M displays a much more fragmented subjectivity than the one he defines here.

Following the immortals, who are seeking the thylacine for National Parks, M discovers a lair or den containing the skeleton of a thylacine pup, and his reaction is far from detached; it is like an intensification of his reverence at the Aboriginal fireplace. He finds it 'so

alarmingly beautiful that he touches it as he would the Holy Grail or his own first child' (159). He concludes that it is too old to be the offspring or sibling of his prey, but there are signs of recent occupation: 'lonesome, is this where she comes for company?' (159). Again, M is demonstrating sensitivity to the thylacine's situation. He then engages in a communion of his own:

he lies down on the ground in a mirror position, eye to eye with the skull, and imagines for a second that he, too, will rot in this cave. In years to come, decades later, an intrepid explorer will find the skeletons and ponder the relationship between the two. (159-60)

M obviously experiences the discovery as a *memento mori*, a reminder of mortality as common to all species. M's reflections also connect to the novel's emphasis on the unreliability of accepted history: if history has no record of a thylacine in M's time, future explorers will have no way of deducing his relation to the older skeleton. And despite his apparent feelings of commonality, this remains a hunter-prey relation. M now lies in wait in the cave for some weeks, becoming once more 'the natural man, who can see and hear and smell what other men cannot', so that although he is asleep when the thylacine returns, 'he finds this sleep needled and disturbed' (161). He emerges to see the thylacine leaving and circles around to intercept her.

The killing of the thylacine is, of course, the moment of extinction, but in *The Hunter* as in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, the sense of the tragedy of extinction derives largely from what the reader knows (the thylacine is the last) rather than from its representation in the text. Instead, the thylacine's death is presented on a thoroughly personal level, and M's experience of it both resembles and contrasts with Garry Marvin's analysis of hunting deaths. Marvin describes these as 'passionate deaths', in terms of the human hunter's experience of them, because

a personal and emotional connectivity is a defining feature of the relationship between the hunter and hunted, and I would argue that it even obtains in that short moment when a hunter aims at a particular pheasant. At the moment of aiming and pulling the trigger, that individual bird is the hunter's bird.⁶³

⁶³ Marvin, 'Wild Killing', 25.

In *The Hunter*, M's experience of this moment is certainly personal, but it is not a moment of connection with the prey but with himself; he pulls the trigger in fulfilment of his humanist understanding of himself as having one true identity.

There is no way he will miss this shot, and he holds the animal in his sights, knowing that he is a killer, and that he, too, will be killed. Part of him wants to keep watching, perhaps even walk away, but another part fixes him there, poised and ready, and it is the part of him he recognises as strong and true. (162-63)

Instead, the passion of M's 'personal and emotional connectivity' with the thylacine surfaces immediately after he fires, not as pleasure but as a sudden grief which immediately undermines the detachment informing the shot itself. As the thylacine lies dying,

Ancient words which might once have helped him, words big enough for the beautiful terribleness of the deed, are long lost and out of reach, so he says, whispers, the best he can think of which is – simply – you won't die alone. (163-64).

Just as he has done with the pup skeleton, M looks into her eyes, but already, 'she in turn does not seem to see him – her eyes are blank and vacant and say nothing' (164). M now appears to experience genuine grief, intensifying the sense of pathos and of irony surrounding her death.

She is more than an animal to him, more than a wallaby or a pademelon, and he observes her body as he would the body of a friend laid out in the morgue. It galls him that he can press a finger against her wet nose, that he can close her eyes: it feels so wrong. She looks nothing like the creature he knew before. (164)

These feelings make the final task of dissection particularly unpleasant to him. M finds, as David Lurie does in *Disgrace*, that dealing with the death of another animal stirs up thoughts of his own mortality and a desire to care for the body. 'Marvelling at the extraordinary patience of the dead, he suddenly decides he will be cremated when he dies' (165). M shaves her fur 'like a mother tenderly brushing the hair of a murder victim,' and 'For a split second he wonders if one day he will go bald – stop it' (165). However, the technological perspective slowly takes over as M reduces the thylacine from prey to specimen. At the moment when another hunter might start taking photographs and trophies, and M himself seems inclined to perform a funerary rite, he unpacks his surgical kit. Piece by piece, the thylacine is reduced to biotechnological samples that are packed away in high tech

storage devices. Steeling himself, M precisely takes the thylacine's blood and transfers it to 'a test tube bearing an opalescent glob of herapin; the test tube he cradles in a titanium cold-pack' (166). Then, in keeping with his returning status as ecofeminist villain, he is more comfortable with the gendered penetration of taking the reproductive organs: 'the obstetrics... is more his style. He cuts into the groin and slides a hand in' (166). As M transfers the thylacine's body into scientific storage, he also conceptually transfers it into that discourse: 'he locks each [ovary] away in a custom-built vial of liquid nitrogen', knowing that 'An egg ... can be fertilized with the sperm of a semi-compatible organism, like a lynx or a wolf. Or, better still ... a sperm could be fashioned from the thylacine's own blood' (166). By the time he has finished, 'the bloody gutted thing is no longer a body to him' (167). Thus, the corporation's globalising interests work to detach M from the thylacine, and as he returns from the plateau, it is clear that he is once again detached from other humans too. When he meets the National Parks workers, 'he decides, almost immediately, that if he has to, he will shoot them' (167). Speaking with them, he finds that, 'Mention of the Armstrongs is now as foreign to M as mention of another planet; he knows it exists, that it has subtle but powerful effects, that it is very far away'. This idea is briefly modified by the next sentence: 'Only Bike is real to him' (169), but M never formulates a specific intention to find Bike. Instead, it seems that he has weighed anchor once more. He heads for the buried coffee that takes the place, for him, of sentimental tokens, returning to the globalising perspectives and practices that informed his character at the novel's outset.

Thus, although the fate of the thylacine species arises from collective human actions, the choice between compassion and detachment is personalised through the novel's presentation of the human-animal relation at the biocentric (individual) level. In terms of M's role, the outcome is not a foregone conclusion, and his experiences, like those of Lurie, show how someone initially resistant to forming human connections might come to do so. What is most optimistic about this is that although, here as in his hunting, he tries to prioritise his mission over any development of compassion, he fails to do so and consciously is ready to change. Less encouragingly, however, his conclusion is that 'it does not matter what he had hoped for, hoping itself was an exercise in delusion, and all the hope in the world could not determine which way a bird would fly, or a leaf would fall' (147).

Conclusion

On the personal level of the narrative, M's sense of self is initially defined by a belief in his own rationality and superiority to other species, the same attitudes that inform the characterisation of the Pitfords of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* or *Disgrace*'s David Lurie. Like the animals of those novels, the thylacine unknowingly counters these views to some extent, and her elusiveness arguably affects M's attitudes. What I have called his hunterly empathy – the sensitivity to the thylacine that is intended to facilitate the hunt – involves similar skills to those central to Plumwood's concept of relational identity, and these begin to be redirected towards a familial belonging that would mean abandoning his hunting and his global lifestyle. However, when M misses this opportunity, in part through failing to prioritise it, the rational and anthropocentric subjectivity that began to blur during the hunt reasserts itself in its culmination and he becomes once again an emotionally and geographically detached killer of animals. Ultimately, the thylacine is killed in the pursuit of human interests rather than remaining or moving further outside human control like the mustelids of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*.

This narrative can also be regarded as a microcosm for the broader problems of human-animal relations raised in the novel (in much the way that the thylacine is made to represent her whole species). Central to *The Hunter*'s role in terms of the temporal focus of this section is its re-presentation of history. Like *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *The Hunter* concentrates on an extinction resulting from colonial human-animal relations, but it also underscores its contemporary relevance by bringing it into the present. The first effect of this is to emphasise the survival of the discourses that led to the thylacine's official extinction in the 1930s. The subjective appreciation for animals displayed by Allbones in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* survives in the environmentalists – some of whom display a version of what I call species posthumanism – but the anthropocentric nineteenth-century science that is presented as colonising in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* also reappears in the globalising biotechnology company. The second effect of the novel's re-presentation is to show that the power relations that surrounded the thylacine's extinction have not shifted. The boundaries of the human may be blurred by interrelationships with technology, but the humanist emphases on the value of rationalism and the superiority of the human are enhanced by technology. The novel also implies that imperialism still dominates international relations in the form of an amorphous globalisation

which, having no centre of its own, is detached from local interests everywhere. The strength of these discourses, the novel suggests, would probably result in the destruction of a surviving thylacine. Conservationist initiatives fail to prevent this, partly because of flaws in their interpretation and implementation, but also because they simply do not have enough power compared with their adversaries. In terms of both globalisation and anthropocentrism, then, the novel's re-presented opposition between compassion and detachment demonstrates that although the former can disrupt the latter, it has not so far effected real change, and *The Hunter* seems doubtful about the possibility.

The challenge to humanism in this novel, then, is articulated in the form of a challenge to the technology-enhanced humanism known as technohumanism and to the prioritisation of global over local concerns. However, unlike *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and *Life of Pi*, the novel does not so much undermine humanist rationalism or the view of humans as central to history, as condemn these perspectives as destructive and in the latter case, self-fulfilling. Thus, *The Hunter* is less optimistic than the other texts that I have discussed so far. *Disgrace* does not solve problems in terms of either species or cultural relations, but explores the possibility of positive change in both areas. *Life of Pi* is a story of survival, and emphasises the power of the unexpected, including in animals and nature, to preserve religious faith and to combat the experience of atrocity. Even in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, where the actions of the characters result in multiple extinctions, the narrator celebrates the unpredictability of nature, and the novel leaves space for the present to avoid repeating history. By contrast, *The Hunter* expresses serious doubts about the contemporary situation, most obviously in terms of human-animal relations, but also in terms of the influence of external forces, as represented in the presence of multinational company engaged in the manufacture of biotechnological weapons and defences. This particular danger seems to point to a larger crisis in the offing, which will include and will derive impetus from ongoing, broad scale globalisation and exploitation. In this novel, however, this is only ever a dimly perceived threat. Elsewhere, this concept takes centre stage: my final chapter explores the representation of cultural and species relations within what might be termed the 'postcolonial apocalyptic' in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, where technological and species posthumanism are again set against one another in a futuristic context.

5. What if? Playing God in *Oryx and Crake*

In the previous two chapters of this section, I suggested that both *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and *The Hunter* use their engagements with the colonial past to illustrate the dangers of maintaining humanist values in contemporary postcolonial and human-animal relations. *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* warns against repeating history, while *The Hunter* indicates that this is just what is happening, and, as I suggested at the end of the previous chapter, seems to suggest that worse might lie ahead. This chapter forms the remaining third of the temporal analysis undertaken in this section, taking as its focus Margaret Atwood's futuristic *Oryx and Crake* (2003).¹ This novel offers an elaboration of the sort of warnings given in both *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and *The Hunter*. The ideas that the past holds valuable lessons about human-animal relations, and that the present is failing to learn such lessons, are both taken up in relation to the future: the implication in *Oryx and Crake* is that there is little sign that these lessons *will* be learned either. Indeed, in this respect the novel overtly contradicts the humanist notion of 'progress', specifically in terms of technological advance as improvement.² The world of *Oryx and Crake* is also anti-humanist in that the deterioration imagined is a worst-case scenario of the effects of continuing to privilege western over non-western cultures and humans and technology over other species and the environment. The novel's protagonist, Snowman, believes himself to be the last surviving human in the wake of the JUVE virus (Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary). He lives alone in a tree, scavenging, negotiating encounters with hybrid animals and trying to socialise with quasi-humans called Crakers. As in Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*,³ the linear narrative of the protagonist's present frames an extensive, disjointed body of flashbacks to his past, which the reader must reconstitute. Snowman's pre-apocalyptic life as Jimmy is also dystopian, but is more recognisable. Atwood describes the novel's genre as 'speculative fiction', because 'it invents nothing we haven't already invented or started to invent'. She writes, 'The *What if* of *Oryx and Crake* is simply, *What if we continue down the road we're already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who's got the will to stop us?*'⁴ Thus, in

¹ Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).

² In this chapter, I continue to use the term humanism as I have been using it, to denote the conceptual privileging of a western, male, rationalist human figure who is a central agent within history. However, it is important to distinguish, in relation to this novel in particular, between this meaning and humanism as placing value in 'the humanities', because *Oryx and Crake* places considerable value on art and especially language.

³ Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

⁴ Margaret Atwood, 'Writing *Oryx and Crake*', <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/atwood/essay.html>.

imagining Jimmy's late twenty-first century world, Atwood distorts a very familiar picture, while still leaving scope for humans in the present to adopt different attitudes, and so avoid the imagined scenario.

In this chapter, I suggest that *Oryx and Crake* explores the relationship between what I am terming technological posthumanism and species posthumanism, and shows how both of these challenges to the notion of human exceptionality can still entail the perpetuation and exacerbation of the notion of humans' exceptionality and superiority to other species, rendering globalisation 'post-postcolonial' and nature 'post-natural'. The relationship between science and international power relations that features in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and *The Hunter* is again at work as biotechnology and globalisation marginalise and 'instrumentalise' animals and non-western humans. This dynamic can be said to extend Atwood's suggestion, in *Survival*, that white Canadians might identify with animals as victims. However, here as in *Life of Pi* and *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, animals are also seen as having a capacity to resist humanism or in this case, its futuristic forms, and attempts to subvert the hegemony of technology include not only direct confrontation by marginalised groups, but also rebel scientists who use biotechnology to effect subversion in collaboration with other animals. Thus, *Oryx and Crake* also shows humans actively trying to ally themselves with animals, through technology, in the resistance of oppression. Finally, I address Jimmy's friend Crake's attempt to destroy humanity and replace it with the animalised humans called Crakers, and the subsequent subversion by various transgenic creatures of their creators' intentions. I argue that Crake's endeavour, while it includes anti-humanist elements, simultaneously epitomises humanist notions of mastery over nature and human centrality to history, and that although *Oryx and Crake* is pessimistic about humans' ability to change, the transgenic creatures' unwitting 'rebellion' conveys the enduring power of nature to resist such dictation.

Post-postcolonialism and post-nature

A key feature of *Oryx and Crake*'s dystopia is the persistence and exacerbation of the sorts of contemporary and historical human-human and human-animal relations discussed in previous chapters. Like *The Hunter*, *Oryx and Crake* represents imperialistic power relations as reincarnated in globalisation. Working on a much larger

scale than Leigh, Atwood offers 'a dystopian scenario of globalisation's endgame',⁵ which can be called 'post-postcolonial'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Zygmunt Bauman has suggested that the fundamental idea of globalisation is that world affairs become decentred without any core of control.⁶ However, Atwood gives her global culture a defined centre, emphasising that, as Bill Ashcroft argues, globalisation means not the end but the evolution of imperialism.⁷ The same 'western' culture that is dominant in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, and infiltrates *Life of Pi* and *Disgrace*, retains and indeed gains in power, but is now based in the United States. Fredric Jameson writes that within globalisation,

the United States is not just one country, or one culture, among others... There is a fundamental dissymmetry in the relationship between the United States and every other country in the world, not only third-world countries, but even Japan and those of Western Europe.⁸

This is exactly the shape of globalisation in *Oryx and Crake*. The world beyond the United States is at best a source of feeble competition; at worst, subject matter for an entertainment industry that takes delight in torment. The internet spectacles which Jimmy and Crake watch as teenagers resonate with Val Plumwood's argument that anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism and 'androcentrism' all entail the stereotyping, devaluation, assimilation and instrumentalism of the margins.⁹ The centre 'others' humans by depicting criminals, especially those of non-western cultures, undergoing corporal and capital punishment; there are 'enemies of the people being topped with swords in someplace that looked like China', 'various supposed thieves having their hands cut off and adulterers and lipstick-wearers being stoned to death by howling crowds, in dusty enclaves that purported to be in fundamentalist countries in the Middle East' (82), and the live execution of American criminals. Just as historical colonists asserted that extinctions of other peoples, like the Tasmanian Aborigines, were inevitable, so Jimmy and Crake find ways to exonerate themselves in the face of these killings, in this case by questioning the veracity of what they are seeing. Crake

⁵Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 277.

⁶Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 59.

⁷Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁸Fredric Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,' in *The Cultures of Globalization: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 58.

⁹Val Plumwood, 'Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism: Parallels and Politics', in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, ed. Karen J. Warren (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press 1997), 343.

maintains that ‘these bloodfests were probably taking place on a back lot somewhere in California with a bunch of extras rounded up off the streets’ (82), while Jimmy asks, ‘Do you think they’re really being executed? ... A lot of them look like simulations’ (83).

Ethnocentrism also informs Atwood’s use of sexual exploitation as a measure of the cultural centre’s corruption. In a late twenty-first century echo of the ‘picture-box’ that appears in *Mr Allbones’ Ferrets*, in which an ‘island’ girl removes her clothes, Jimmy and Crake frequent websites where the exotic and the erotic overlap. The main example of this is a paedophilia site called HottTotts,¹⁰ which is ethnocentric and androcentric at once; it ‘claimed to show real sex tourists, filmed while doing things they’d be put in jail for back in their home countries’ (89). At first, Jimmy has the same removed response to this that he does to the killing of criminals: ‘None of those little girls had ever seemed real – they’d always struck him as digital clones’ (90). However, he is captivated by a child who turns her own gaze directly on the camera and seems to say, ‘*I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want*’ (91). Jimmy ‘felt burned by this look ... for the first time he’d felt that what they’d been doing was wrong’ (91). Jimmy’s indifference is now replaced with obsession, but this is strongly informed by exoticism and even animalisation. When he sees a similar girl who has been kept in a San Francisco garage, he admires her ‘beautiful cat’s face’ which displays ‘the same blend of innocence and contempt and understanding’ (255).

Finally, Jimmy meets Oryx, originally a prostitute chosen by Crake for her likeness to the HottTotts child, and now both his girlfriend and employee. However, although ‘she was no longer a picture... Suddenly she was real, three dimensional’ (308), Jimmy persists in his voyeuristic othering. When he too begins a relationship with Oryx, Jimmy insists that she really is the girl from HottTotts (91)¹¹ and from the garage (315-16), and starts demanding intimate details: ‘What else did they make you do?’ (139), ‘Did they

¹⁰ The name HottTotts sexualises the children, but also exoticises them in that it recalls the derogatory European term ‘Hottentot’ once applied to the Khoikhoi people of Southern Africa. Atwood also explicitly connects the content with Swift’s parody of travel narratives; a HottTotts client is described as ‘the standard gargantuan Gulliver-in-Lilliput male torso – a life-sized man shipwrecked on an island of delicious midgets’ (90).

¹¹ Some commentators, including Tolan (286), have accepted this idea, probably because Snowman still believes it: the text reads ‘This is how the two of them first saw Oryx’ (90). However, although the narrative is in the third person, the views being conveyed are always Snowman’s and not those of a reliable narrator. What Oryx says is, ‘I don’t think this is me ... A lot of girls did these things. Very many’ (91). It is only upon seeing Jimmy’s disappointment that she amends, ‘It might be me... Would that make you happy Jimmy?’ (91). The novel’s larger points about ethnocentric and sexual exploitation are of course revealed either way, but in individual terms, Oryx’s control of her own story is at stake here.

rape you?’ (144), ‘What went on in that garage...?’ (314).¹² He is obviously fascinated by her physical otherness too: ‘She had a triangular face – big eyes, a small jaw – a hymenoptera face, a mantid face, the face of a Siamese cat’ (115). These repeated associations with cats could derive from more than face shape: Jimmy is struck by each girl’s ‘look’ of innocence, contempt and understanding, which may contribute to his impression of them as feline. If so, this even resonates with Derrida’s experience of his cat’s gaze: ‘at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble ... overcoming my embarrassment’. However, whereas Derrida builds on this to the point of concluding that, were compassion for animals to be taken seriously, it ‘would have to change the very basis ... of the philosophical problematic of the animal’,¹³ Jimmy’s perception of Oryx’s look does not alter his relation to her. Instead, he continues to regard her as an object to be defined by his fantasies, as if she were still on a website. In their exoticisation of both violence and sex, then, the spectacles consumed by Jimmy and Crake demonstrate the continued presence of the western cultural imperialism represented in the novels already discussed. Meanwhile, closer to the centre, globalising American culture is apparently swallowing up nearby nations in an obvious echo of historical colonisation.

Americanisation, of course, has long been of concern to Canada. Linda Hutcheon writes that Canadians ‘often feel somehow politically threatened by the constant reminders of the power and the imperialist impulses of our neighbour to the south’,¹⁴ while Atwood herself has argued that this is a factor in Canada’s preoccupation with the idea of survival:

For early explorers and settlers, it meant bare survival in the face of ‘hostile’ elements and/or natives... For French Canada after the English took over it became cultural survival... And in English Canada now while the Americans are taking over it is acquiring a similar meaning.¹⁵

¹² As Tolan observes, Jimmy’s curiosity simultaneously exposes the reader too: ‘eastern Oryx’s narrative perpetually threatens to also turn Atwood’s typically affluent western reader into a voyeur, making him or her complicit in Jimmy’s morbid fascinations’ (Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, 288).

¹³ Jacques Derrida, ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),’ trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* 28, 2 (2002): 372, 395.

¹⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 78.

¹⁵ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), 32.

In *Oryx and Crake*, these fears have apparently been realised by assimilatory globalisation. With the exception of her other dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*,¹⁶ Atwood's previous novels are set at least partially in Canada, and many address Canada's postcolonial condition directly, as do her non-fictional texts *Survival* and *Strange Things*.¹⁷ In *Oryx and Crake*, however, Canada is conspicuous by its absence; various locations (such as Chicago and Hudson's Bay) show that the setting is North America, but there is no reference to Canada by name, as if there were no longer a national distinction.¹⁸ Thus, Canada has effectively been colonised for a second time. Meanwhile, as in the novels previously discussed, animals are also the victims of this. However, what is striking about Atwood's rendition of this point is that, whereas the extinction of animals in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* is occasioned by European colonisation, the futuristic colonisation depicted in *Oryx and Crake* can be seen to result from environmental destruction.

In *Survival*, Atwood argues that animal victims in Canadian literature are often symbols of a national victim complex. Her suggestion is 'that Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life-denying experience as individuals – the culture threatens the "animal" within them – and that their identification with animals is the expression of a deep-seated cultural fear'.¹⁹ In *Oryx and Crake*, the depiction of extinction is the opposite of Julia Leigh's intimate account of the death of the last thylacine: Atwood illustrates extinction on as large a scale as possible through 'Extinctathon', an online game that Jimmy and Crake play as teenagers. When they log on, a phrase reads, '*Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones*' (80); the aim of the game is to identify extinct species by classification, habitat and cause of extinction. The database, although it covers only fifty years of species loss, amounts to 'a couple of hundred pages of fine

¹⁶ There are several references to smuggling resources and people over the border into Canada, and it seems likely that this is the same border that, in a flashback, the protagonist tries to cross with her family. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*. (1986; repr., London: Vintage, 1996), 93, 323, 94-95, .

¹⁷ Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁸ Coral Ann Howells suggests that 'national boundaries have blurred as Atwood responds to her widening international readership, arguing for a shared recognition of complicity in globalisation, which threatens human survival'. Coral Ann Howells, *Margaret Atwood*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 12.

¹⁹ Atwood, *Survival*, 79.

print' (81).²⁰ Thus, the parallel extinctions of Canada and animals resonate with Atwood's symbolic association in *Survival*. However, *Oryx and Crake* is demonstrably more concerned than *Survival* with the impact of environmental destruction on other animals. These disappearances are not just parallel; they also have the same cause. As Philip Armstrong puts it, the environment in *Oryx and Crake* has become 'post-natural'.²¹ In Florida, 'the rains had stopped coming, the same year Lake Okeechobee had shrunk to a reeking mud puddle and the Everglades had burned for three weeks straight' (63). Just during Jimmy's parents' lifetime, 'the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes' (24). The result is a loss of human habitat:

There were the things [Jimmy's] mother rambled on about sometimes, about how everything was being ruined and would never be the same again, like the beach house ... that got washed away with the rest of the beaches and quite a few of the eastern coastal cities when the sea-level rose so quickly. (63)

Elite scientists like Jimmy's parents are still protected from the increasingly hostile environment, because they are housed in corporation-owned Compounds, gated communities contained by checkpoints and armed guards. However, climate change has also driven people north; realising a threat that appears in *Surfacing* when an American company wants to set up a holiday resort on the protagonist's island,²² the 'top brass' of the HelthWyzer corporation retreat to 'the Moosonee HelthWyzer Gated Vacation Community on the western shore of Hudson's Bay', when they want 'to beat the heat' (178). Damage to the environment may be a significant reason, then, for Canada's apparent assimilation. And alarmingly, despite the obviously destructive impact that anthropocentrism has already had, the scientists at the heart of the new post-postcolonial world are persisting undeterred with their exploitation of such animals as are left.

²⁰ This is obviously a reference to Adam's naming of animals for the first time, just after their creation; MaddAddam is listing animals at the other end of the process. Indeed, David Wood observes that 'in the sixth major period of global species extinction that we are currently witnessing, most of the 27,000 species that become extinct each year die out before even having been discovered, let alone named'. So it may be that at least some of the animals that MaddAddam lists were not named even the first time until after their extinction. David Wood, 'Thinking With Cats', in *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 135.

²¹ Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 173.

²² Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (1972; repr., London: Virago Press, 1979), 88.

In *Oryx and Crake*'s internet spectacles, anthropocentrism surfaces in the killing of animals for human ends, just as it does in *Disgrace*, *Life of Pi*, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, and *The Hunter*. However, unlike the protagonists of those novels, Jimmy and Crake are not killers but spectators. Just for entertainment, 'they'd watch animal snuff sites, Felicia's Frog Squash and the like' (82). This means that these animals' deaths have far less immediacy or significance than they do in any of the other texts; neither the *Lösung* offered by Bev Shaw in *Disgrace*, nor the hunger that motivates Pi and Allbones in their fishing and poaching, nor even the assertion of human superiority that informs M's hunting has any application here. Instead, the boys are thoroughly divorced from and indifferent to what they are seeing: 'one stomped frog, one cat being torn apart by hand, was much like another' (82).

While both domestic and wild animals are being destroyed, however, the Compound scientists are busy producing more, exclusively for human use, and in Atwood's own terms, this amounts to sacrilege. For Atwood, as for Pi in Martel's *Life of Pi*, reverence for God and nature are the same thing. However, whereas this is uplifting to Pi, Atwood calls her position 'pessimistic pantheism', because she feels that 'God is everywhere, but losing'. She explains that if God created everything and everything has God in it, then 'each time we terminate a species, "God" becomes more limited'. She concludes, 'if I were the Biblical God I would be very annoyed. He made the thing and saw that it was good. And now people are scribbling all over the artwork'.²³ This is, of course, already evident in human-animal relations. The importation of animals like rabbits and mustelids to New Zealand was, as Farrell emphasises, a case of humans believing that they could interfere with nature without negative consequences. Humans in *Oryx and Crake*, however, are much more 'sacrilegious' in their 'scribbling'; they demonstrate the same desire to control nature, but have greatly enhanced power to do so because of advances in transgenic science. The result is that the kind of admiration for God attached to 'natural' animals in *Life of Pi* gives way to sport and self-congratulation:

The rakunks had begun as an after-hours hobby on the part of one of the OrganInc biolab hotshots. There'd been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God. (51)

Now that humans have established this god-like power, the anthropocentric assumption that animals only exist as resources for humans becomes a reality.

²³ Margaret Atwood, 'Interview with Margaret Atwood,' <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/atwood/interview.html>.

As F. Barbara Orlans et al. explain in *The Human Use of Animals*, the creation of transgenic animals raises multiple problems, including questions of religion, environment and animal welfare.²⁴ For Atwood, these issues overlap, and in *Oryx and Crake*, they surface in relation to the many transgenic species being created to serve human needs. The bobkittens (dwarf bobcats) are an early example of such practices: they are created solely to control feral cats and a strain of luminous transgenic rabbits (apparently the escaped descendants of Alba, a real transgenic rabbit designed by the ‘transgenic artist’ Eduardo Kac and born in 2000²⁵). The story of the bobkittens has much in common with the New Zealand animal introductions addressed by *Mr Allbones’ Ferrets*; like the mustelids, the bobkittens are intended to deal with rabbits, but this has disastrous side-effects: ‘Small dogs went missing from backyards, babies from prams; short joggers were mauled’ (164).

In creating the bobkittens, then, futuristic humans have obviously failed to learn from their past mistakes. Nor have they been deterred by the unexpected actions of the bobkittens. Jimmy sees similarly customised animals-in-progress at Crake’s university. The wolvgos (wolf-dogs) are vicious canines commissioned as a form of defence, and Crake describes them as ‘Better than an alarm system – no way of disarming these guys’ (205). This comparison emphasises that, as Orlans et al. warn, transgenic technology means that ‘Living things become objectified, designed, and invented to suit our needs, as if they were computers or stereo equipment’.²⁶ However, the bobkittens and wolvgos at least retain or regain their wild animality; when he is threatened by wolvgos later, Snowman observes, ‘[I]t hasn’t taken much to reverse fifty thousand years of man-canid interaction’ (108).

The ChickieNobs, the most ethically complex of the novel’s transgenic animals, are chickens taken to the opposite extreme, reduced to meat and almost to plants. Jimmy is shown ‘a large bulblike object ... covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing’ (202). Although as a child, Jimmy was once upset to see the incineration of dead cows, sheep and pigs, because ‘Steaks didn’t have heads’ (18), he is equally horrified by the living ChickieNobs’ lack of heads. ‘The thing was a nightmare. It was like an animal-

²⁴ F. Barbara Orlans, Tom L. Beauchamp, Rebecca Dresser, David B. Mortan and John P. Gluck, *The Human Use of Animals: Case Studies in Ethical Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁵ See Eduardo Kac, ‘GFP Bunny’, <http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html#gfpbunnyanchor>.

²⁶ Orlans et al., *The Human Use of Animals*, 97.

protein tuber' (202).²⁷ The ChickieNobs also raise questions of welfare. As Orlans et al. explain, problems arise in relation to the treatment of transgenic animals, especially when no natural equivalent exists.

What constitutes humane treatment for an animal that has substantial genetic material from more than one species? ... how are its human caretakers to assess its well-being? At minimum, the normal approach of assessing species-appropriate behavior in a natural or captive habitat will need to be refined to formulate humane treatment standards.

They observe, 'It has even been suggested that genetic engineers could strive to create animals that suffer less in cages or confined pens, because their ability to learn, remember and perceive their environment has been genetically impaired'.²⁸

In *Oryx and Crake*, this is exactly what has been done in the creation of the ChickieNobs; Crake and Jimmy's guide explains that most of the brain function has been removed, and remarks, 'the animal-welfare freaks won't be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain' (203). In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway suggests that the ChickieNobs 'illustrate exactly what Sarah Franklin means by designer ethics, which aim to bypass cultural struggle with just-in-time, "high technology" breakthroughs'.²⁹ Franklin writes,

It is not so much that the pre-genomic beliefs that life has a structure, or some kind of internal design, have been displaced than that these long-held attitudes to 'life itself' have been *repositioned alongside* a new enthusiasm for the potential of made-to-order recombinant outcomes.³⁰

Jimmy and Crake's final exchange on the subject illustrates the fundamental debate. Jimmy asks about the wolvogs, 'What if they get out?' (205), while worrying about both species, 'Why is it he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far?' (206). Crake answers both the spoken and the unspoken questions: 'they won't get out. Nature is to zoos as God is to churches ... Those walls and bars are there ... Not to keep us out, but to keep them in. Mankind needs barriers in both cases' (206). When Jimmy says, 'I thought you didn't believe in God', Crake replies 'I don't believe in Nature either ... Or not with a capital N' (206).

²⁷ Jimmy later tries to ignore what he has learned; he even consumes ChickieNobs 'nubbins' when they become available. However, his initial discomfort appears genuine.

²⁸ Orlans et al., *The Human Use of Animals*, 96.

²⁹ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 268.

³⁰ Sarah Franklin, 'Stem Cells R Us2', in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier (London: Blackwell, 2004), 60.

Thus, what Jimmy is struggling to express is something very like Atwood's own impression that humans are defacing God's or nature's work, while Crake goes beyond designer ethics to adopt Plumwood's description of anthropocentric instrumentalism: 'Since there are no moral limits, expediency is the appropriate morality'.³¹ However, this 'expediency approach' is most evident in *Oryx and Crake* in relation to human hybridisation, including xenotransplantation and finally transhumanism.

In her 'Manifesto for Cyborgs', Donna Haraway argues that humans are already cyborgs, because biology, evolutionary theory and technology have blurred the boundaries between humans and animals and between organisms and machines. She suggests that a cyborg world could be 'about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star War apocalypse.' Alternatively, it could be 'about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'.³² Xenotransplantation in *Oryx and Crake* brings all three facets of Haraway's cyborgs into play, but the result is more like an imposed grid of control than an embracing of cyborg interrelationships (although, as I will suggest in the next section, the latter view does make an appearance). Few creatures in the novel meet the traditional definition of a cyborg; their artificial components are usually organic rather than synthetic, but technology, in the form of biotechnology, is what makes this possible. Thus, technology permits physical interrelationships between human and animal, which blurs the boundaries between technological and species posthumanism. For the most part, however, the result amounts to technohumanism; N. Katherine Hayles warns that humans' interrelationships with technology can serve to perpetuate the humanist subject,³³ and this is very much the case in *Oryx and Crake* as biotechnology prolongs and enhances human lives, on an individual level, at the expense of other species. Indeed, with xenotransplantation as with splicing, designer ethics ensures that conceptual human boundaries remain stable, so that the blending of species facilitates rather than contests anthropocentrism.

Jimmy's father is 'one of the foremost architects of the pigoon project', which grows 'an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host' (22).

³¹ Plumwood, 'Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism', 341.

³² Donna J. Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', *The Haraway Reader* (New York and London: Routledge 2003), 11-12, 13.

³³ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 287.

Pig-to-human xenotransplantation has already begun at the clinical level. A PBS Frontline report in 2001, for instance, documented trials in which stroke and Parkinson's disease patients received foetal pig neural cells, and one man survived liver failure with an external 'bridge' liver from a transgenic pig.³⁴ The risks of organ rejection and pig-to-human infection which are still being negotiated in the present³⁵ have been overcome in the transgenic pigoons of *Oryx and Crake*.

However, the paradoxical human-animal relations central to xenotransplantation remain. In her discussion of xenotransplantation in *Animal*, Erica Fudge observes that potentially,

the underlying principles of [medical science] might lead us closer and closer to finding something like a scientific basis for anthropomorphism ... Animals are like us, and if they are like us it is very difficult to make the case for using them as if they were like a breathing equivalent of the auto spare-part centre.³⁶

Biological science, then, could support attitudes to other animals based on similarity rather than difference, perhaps like the deep ecology of *The Hunter*'s immortals or Jarrah Armstrong. Often, however, new boundaries are simply constructed. For instance, Lynda Birke makes the observation that species is conventionally defined in terms of genes. She writes, 'if you start to think about the similarity of DNA, or the similarities of its function, then ... the boundaries start to dissolve. To avoid that worrying prospect, we can label the genes as embodying essence'.³⁷ In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood gives a similar example of designer ethics. Publicly, 'it was claimed that none of the defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical to at least some of their own' (23-24). However, even designer ethics seem to be replaced with the ethics-free 'expediency approach' in the thinking of the scientists themselves: 'as time went on ... and meat became harder to come by ... it was noticeable how often back bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies

³⁴ Frontline, 'Organ Farm', PBS, 2001. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/organfarm/>

³⁵ Rejection may be minimised by either removing or 'knocking out' the α -1, 3- galactosyltransferase gene, both modifications which were successfully made in 2002. The dangers of pig-human infection might also be minimised by transgenic means, or, as in a recent New Zealand project to produce insulin in diabetics, by using pigs from long-isolated breeding lines. Roger Dobson. 'Scientists produce genetically engineered, cloned pigs for xenotransplantation'. *British Medical Journal* 324, 7329 (2002). <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/324/7329/70/f>; New Zealand Press Association, 'Govt approves pig-human tissue transplant medical trial,' Three News, <http://www.3news.co.nz/News/NationalNews/Govt-approves-medical-trial-involving-pig-cells-in-humans/tabid/423/articleID/76580/cat/64/Default.aspx>.

³⁶ Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 109.

³⁷ Lynda Birke, *Feminism, Animals and Science: The Naming of the Shrew* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 84.

turned up on the staff café menu' (24).³⁸ OrganInc's scientists, then, do not share the scruples attributed to the general public regarding the consumption of human cells.³⁹ Later scientific developments in the novel suggest even more complacency about species distinctions; working for HelthWyzer, Jimmy's father grows human neocortical tissue in the pigoons. Neocortex, which controls higher brain function in mammals, including learning ability and language, is the site of much that has traditionally been seen to set humans apart from other species. Thus, through the pigoons, Atwood explores the possible extremes to which biotechnology might go in its manipulation of life and of ethics; not even their own species, it seems, is sacred to these scientists.

In Jimmy's dystopian world, then, *Oryx and Crake* offers a bleak outlook for both postcolonialism and for nonhuman species, exploring the possibility that, instead of being undermined by posthumanist interrelationships between humans and technology or animals, notions of mastery might come to dominate political and species relations even more than they do now. The humanist concept of progress is thus contradicted too by the representation of technological advance as disadvantaging all but a privileged human, western, capitalist, technohumanist few, and as ultimately self-destructive. However, the hegemony of those few in *Oryx and Crake* is met with direct confrontation on the part of human groups, as well as indirect subversion both by rebel scientists and by nonhuman animals.

Posthumanist resistance

In *Post-colonial Transformation*, Bill Ashcroft underscores that colonised people are not passive victims but resist via various 'strategies in the transformation of colonial power'. Discussing the relationship between colonisation and globalisation, he argues that 'The strategies by which colonized communities have coped with, resisted and consumed the cultural capital presented to them by imperial cultures are recapitulated on a global scale

³⁸ The characters usually eat products like 'SoyOboy burgers' and 'sveltana no-meat cocktail sausages' instead of meat. Real Japanese beef is 'rare as diamonds', and Snowman prizes spam as a delicacy. Given the prevalence of feedlots in the present, what this alimentary scenario implies is not that meat animals can no longer survive, but rather that natural resources are becoming so scarce that humans can no longer afford to feed crops to animals.

³⁹ Already, some people are entirely comfortable with the consumption of animals with a human component. Daniel Dinello notes that 'Aqua Bounty Farms applied for FDA approval for a salmon with human growth hormone. The fish grows ten times faster than normal. It would be the first genetically modified animal approved for human consumption.' Daniel Dinello. *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 259. The consumption of pigoons, then, is not so far-fetched. For just as the definition of species shifts, so can the definition of cannibalism.

in local communities throughout the world'.⁴⁰ The theme of resistance pervades much of Atwood's work. In *Survival*, she delineates a process towards non-victimhood, and this is gone through by many of the protagonists of her other novels, including *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle* and *The Blind Assassin*. However, as I have been suggesting, *Oryx and Crake* is much more concerned with species issues than Atwood's previous work. In *Survival*, Atwood writes,

There comes a point at which seeing yourself as a victimised animal – naming your condition, as the crucial step from the ignorance of Position One through the knowledge of Position Two to the self-respect of Position Three – can become the *need* to see yourself as a victimised animal, and at that point you will be locked into Position Two, unable to go any further.⁴¹

These ideas are at work in some of Atwood's earlier novels: *Surfacing*'s protagonist starts to believe that she is becoming an animal (of indeterminate species), but recovers after a few days, while *The Edible Woman*'s Marian becomes unable to eat meat or any other food until she breaks off her oppressive engagement.⁴² Jimmy's childhood relation to animals is similarly informed by a view of animals as mirrors of his own feelings of victimhood. He is upset when his father's colleagues joke about eating pigeons, because 'he thought of pigeons as creatures much like himself. Neither he nor they had a lot of say in what was going on' (24). Later, when his mother Sharon leaves, taking his pet rakunk Killer to liberate her, his concern that Killer will 'be helpless on her own ... everything hungry would tear her into furry black and white pieces' (61)⁴³ seems partly conflated with his own feelings of abandonment and concern for his mother (67). On the other hand, to entertain any such feeling for animals is obviously rare in Jimmy's cultural context; even more than Pi, who regards animals as expressions of God, or Allbones, who maintains his subjective liking for animals despite Eugenia's lecturing, Jimmy is going against the grain in resisting rationalist values. Moreover, breaking with *Survival*'s patterns, Jimmy matures not by ceasing to worry about animals but by acknowledging, in his responses to the wolvoogs and ChickieNobs, a genuine discomfort at humans' interference with nature. In this respect, although Jimmy takes

⁴⁰ Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation*, 207.

⁴¹ Atwood, *Survival*, 81.

⁴² Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969).

⁴³ Snowman later acknowledges that rakunks must be able to take care of themselves after all: 'how else to account for the annoyingly large population of them now infesting this neck of the woods?' (61).

no action, his attitudes are aligned with those of his rebellious mother and of radical activist groups.

Sharon goes through a process comparable to that experienced by David Lurie in *Disgrace*. Before Jimmy's birth and during his early childhood, she is in a similar privileged and rationalist position to that held by Lurie as a university lecturer; she lives in the Compounds working as a biotechnologist on the pigoon project. She initially holds the sorts of hopes expressed by Ronald M. Green, who argues that 'Gene enhancements, if properly handled, could narrow the gap between society's haves and have-nots and between the developed and developing nations'; for instance, 'germline gene modifications may actually *lower* health care costs for everyone'.⁴⁴ In a conversation with Jimmy's father, Sharon says, 'Don't you remember ... everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people – not just people with money' (57). Over time, however, Sharon's position is undermined by her experiences and, like Lurie, she expresses increasing reverence for the nonhuman. She condemns the project to grow human neocortical tissue in pigoons, saying to Jimmy's father, 'You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's ... sacrilegious'. He counters, 'It's just proteins, you know that! There's nothing sacred about cells and tissue' (57). Sharon replies 'I'm familiar with the theory' (57); she obviously no longer subscribes to it. Then, in a more radical version of Lurie's attempts at action in the clinic and in moving the sheep, Sharon escapes to become an activist. She reappears during the Coffee Wars, a conflict over an interference with nature which disadvantages human groups:

the Happicuppa coffee bush was designed so that all of its beans would ripen simultaneously, and coffee could be grown on huge plantations and harvested with machines. This threw the small growers out of business and reduced both them and their labourers to starvation-level poverty. (178-79)

This meets with opposition on a global scale. 'Riots broke out, crops were burned, Happicuppa cafés were looted, Happicuppa personnel were car-bombed or kidnapped or shot by snipers or beaten to death by mobs' (179). Sharon appears in footage of a blockade of Happicuppa's Maryland headquarters. Later, talking to Crake, Jimmy supposes that 'she got involved with some God's Gardeners-type outfit' (213). This group is never explicitly defined in the novel, but Atwood has since commented,

⁴⁴ Ronald M. Green, *Babies By Design: The Ethics of Genetic Choice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 137.

It is noteworthy that the covenant made by God after the flood was not just with Noah, but with every living thing. I assume that the 'God's Gardeners' organization in *Oryx and Crake* used this kind of insight as a cornerstone of their theology.⁴⁵

This group is much more active than the environmentalists of *The Hunter*, who are drugged and ineffectual even when they supposed to be looking for the thylacine, but its members are presented even less sympathetically. The representation of God's Gardeners has much in common with the derogatory depiction of animal activists by scientists, as discussed by Lynda Birke, Arnold Arluke and Mike Michael: 'put simply, animal rights activists are represented as anti-human, deceivers, and terrorists'.⁴⁶ Jimmy's university roommate Bernice is described as a 'God's Gardeners pyromaniac vegan' (204), and is the author of some of the 'hate mail and death threats from the God's Gardeners' (244) that his girlfriend Amanda receives over the use of animal corpses in her art. Later, during the spread of the JUVE virus, newscasters report 'a crazed mob of God's Gardeners, liberating a ChickieNobs production facility ... those ChickieNob things can't even walk!' (340). However, like the representation of the environmentalists in *The Hunter*, the overall effect of this is to convey frustration with God's Gardeners' methods, rather than a lack of sympathy with their ends, especially since another group's approach to a similar agenda is presented with less irony.

Whereas Sharon's response to unscrupulous biotechnology is to flee, other scientists remain to attempt subversion from within the Compounds, pretending to conform in order to learn about the corporations' projects and sabotage them using their own technology. An outbreak of disease among the animals at OrganInc is a possible instance of this sort of resistance. Jimmy overhears his father and a colleague speculating about possible sources, including competing scientists or 'just a nutbar. Some cult thing' (18). Then Jimmy's father adds, 'This bug is something new though. We've got the bioprint' (19). This suggests that the disease has been deliberately developed as well as released, and it could therefore have been produced within the Compound by rogue OrganInc scientists (it is even possible that Sharon herself is involved, since her job was to develop the pigoons' biological defences). Years later, Jimmy learns from Crake that MaddAddam, the host of the internet game Extinctathon,

⁴⁵ Margaret Atwood. 'Interview with Margaret Atwood' <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/atwood/interview.html>. Atwood elaborates in her recently released *The Year of the Flood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009). I concentrate here on their representation in and in relation to *Oryx and Crake*.

⁴⁶ Lynda Birke, Arnold Arluke and Mike Michael, *The Sacrifice: How Scientific Experiments Transform Animals and People*. (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), 130.

takes just this approach. Crake continues to play until he is a Grandmaster, and finds that the game is a front for organised biotechnological resistance. When he logs in, the slogan now reads ‘*Adam named the animals. MaddAddam customizes them*’ (216).⁴⁷ Crake says, ‘I thought at first that they were just another crazy Animal Liberation org. But there’s more to it than that. I think they’re after the machinery. They’re after the whole system, they want to shut it down’ (217). Most significantly in terms of species relations, MaddAddam’s activities involve what Philip Armstrong describes as cooperation with nonhuman agents.⁴⁸ Indeed, *Oryx and Crake* approaches Haraway’s vision of a cyborg world where humans embrace their kinship with technology and with other animals simultaneously. The Grandmasters, who must be ‘Compound, or Compound-trained’ (217),⁴⁹ are using biotechnology to enhance pest species’ disruptive potential, often targeting the Compounds’ ethically questionable projects:

A tiny parasitic wasp had invaded several ChickieNobs installations, carrying a modified form of chicken pox, specific to the ChickieNob and fatal to it. The installations had had to be incinerated before the epidemic could be brought under control... Happicuppa coffee bean crops were menaced by a new bean weevil found to be resistant to all known pesticides... A microbe that ate the tar in asphalt had turned several interstate highways to sand. (216)

These modifications obviously entail the use of animals on MaddAddam’s part, but perhaps not one that Plumwood would consider instrumental,⁵⁰ since human and animal ends are apparently complementary here. In MaddAddam, then, *Oryx and Crake* recovers the potential of posthumanism to combat anthropocentric and political hegemony. Indeed, it offers further sources of such subversive power. As well as exploring the positive impact of a view of humans as one species among many, which I am calling species posthumanist, in the way that *Disgrace* and *The Hunter* do, *Oryx and Crake* also shows how technology in the form of transgenic science allows the Grandmasters to promote the agency of animals rather than reduce them to resources.

⁴⁷ Like God’s Gardeners, MaddAddam’s name, slogans and agenda associate them with Christianity; Adam may be significant to them not only for his naming of animals but also for his role as steward of animals.

⁴⁸ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 93.

⁴⁹ Again this means Sharon could have been involved. Atwood offers no evidence either way, but raises the possibility of a connection when, meeting the former-Grandmasters, Jimmy wonders, ‘had any of them known his mother...?’ (300).

⁵⁰ She writes that in non-instrumental use, ‘even where the other’s agency is overridden by the user’s own in the process of bringing it into use, it is acknowledged as more than a means to these ends, as an independent centre of striving which places limits on the self and on the kinds of use which may be made of it.’ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 142.

In terms of resistance, then, *Oryx and Crake*, like the other novels I have discussed, explores discomfort with and opposition to the instrumentalism of animals and foregrounds animals' own disruptive power. Moreover, it explores ways in which what I am calling technological and species posthumanism collaborate as humans use technology to promote animals' disruptions of the oppressive regime. Ultimately, however, the influence of both Compound and anti-Compound agents pales in comparison to that of Crake. Believing that the human species has doomed itself, he takes matters into his own hands and sets about replacing it with a sustainable alternative. In the aftermath, Atwood arguably brings her version of pantheism to the fore, as some form of life-force reclaims control.

Post humans

In her brief acquaintance with the teenage Crake, Sharon concludes that he is 'intellectually honourable', because 'You could have a conversation with him ... in which events and hypotheses were followed through to their logical conclusions' (69). However, this may be partly because, as Crake tells Jimmy, God and nature remain within defined boundaries for him and do not pose any ethical obstacles to the pursuit of hypotheses. This holds true despite the fact that the hypothesis that obsesses him is that humans are highly unsatisfactory animals. Snowman remembers,

Monkey brains, had been Crake's opinion. Monkey paws, monkey curiosity, the desire to take apart, turn inside out, smell, fondle, measure, improve, trash, discard – all hooked up to monkey brains, an advanced model of monkey brains but monkey brains all the same. (99)

This is of course very similar to the narrator's insistence in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* that humans are only 'clever monkeys': Crake considers human thought instinctive and not a mark of superiority. Indeed, in terms of sexuality, Crake appears to consider humans *inferior* to other species; in a twist on Descartes' description of other animals as automata, he describes humans as faulty hormone robots (166). He even blames 'the external causes of death' on 'War, which is to say misplaced sexual energy, which we [he and his employees] consider to be a larger factor than the economic, racial, and religious causes often cited' (293).⁵¹ Moreover, according to Crake, humans have effectively doomed themselves:

⁵¹ Here, Crake's perspective seems closely related to the view expressed by Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, that sexual desires and competitiveness result in aggression. For instance, Freud writes,

As a species we're in deep trouble, worse than anyone's saying... we're running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply *for everyone*. (295)

Taking these considerations to their logical conclusions, Crake's 'solution' pushes the concept of environmentalist sacrifice to its most radical extreme.

In 'Thinking With Cats', David Wood discusses a significant conflict between compassion for the individual, as expressed by animal rights advocates, for instance, and environmentalists' concern for ecosystems, a conflict in which the latter have sometimes met with 'the charge of eco-fascism, for the apparent willingness to sacrifice some animals (even humans!) for the greater good'. Wood explains that some environmentalists 'stress the value of change, even dramatic change', observing,

If we send two-thirds of the species on the planet into extinction, and then die out ourselves, we can assume that evolutionary forces would continue, and perhaps a new dominant species, less predisposed to violence, would emerge in a few million years. One would have to be very patient, and very detached to acquiesce in such a process with such an outcome.⁵²

In *Oryx and Crake*, Crake's motivations are never fully spelt out, but this is his apparent ambition. Indeed, Crake is so detached from his own species that he does more than acquiesce in human extinction; he tries to instigate it. He tells Jimmy that the BlyssPluss pill he has developed is an aphrodisiac which will secretly sterilise people: 'With the BlyssPluss Pill the human race will have a better chance of swimming ... Fewer people, therefore more to go around'. When Jimmy asks, 'What if the fewer people are very greedy and wasteful?', Crake only says, 'They won't be' (295). When the 'contraceptive' ingredient in BlyssPluss turns out to be an anthropocidal virus (JUVE),⁵³ Snowman is left alone in the world, wondering, 'Had he been a lunatic or an

If we do away with personal rights over material wealth, there still remains prerogative in the field of sexual relationships, which is bound to become the source of the strongest dislike and the most violent hostility among men who in other respects are on an equal footing.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York, Norton, 1986), 60-61. <http://www.archive.org/details/CivilizationAndItsDiscontents>. Crake, however, is inclined to concentrate on the frustration of unrequited love or desire as the cause of problems (165), whereas Freud appears to blame sexual competitiveness and its repression by civilization.

⁵² Wood, 'Thinking With Cats', 142.

⁵³ The aphrodisiac claim might, like the 'birth control' claim, be another euphemism on Crake's part; earlier, he observes that 'Men can imagine their own deaths, they can see them coming, and the mere thought of impending death acts like an aphrodisiac' (120). He might, therefore, consider this a likely effect of BlyssPluss, as people start to realise they are doomed.

intellectually honourable man who'd thought things through to their logical conclusion? And was there any difference?' (343). However, Crake does not exhibit the patience that Wood describes as necessary to environmentalist sacrifice. Instead, Crake can be seen as an extreme example of a tendency within humanity towards anthropocentric arrogance, which the novel already condemns in relation to the transgenicists who play 'create-an-animal'. Failing to acknowledge that he too might have shortcomings, Crake becomes the exaggeration of all that is humanist, empowered by technology. He regards himself as the ultimate master of nature and of history, as he tries to seize control and dictate the future of life on earth, replacing humans with his own design: the Crakers.

The different values informing the creation of the Crakers belong to apparently opposing standpoints. Crake's intention is to initiate a scenario resembling that of the catastrophe novel as described by Richard Kerridge: 'The catastrophe novel is always an opportunity for a new start,' in which 'A community is able to sever itself cleanly from the culture of the past, while remembering that culture well enough to learn from its mistakes'.⁵⁴ Crake explains that in his transgenic humans or Crakers, as Oryx calls them, 'What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world's current illnesses' (305). The Crakers effectively literalise what Armstrong calls 'therio-primitivism', a 'specifically modern conjunction between animality and pre- or non-modern forms of humanity'. In the negative version of this, he writes, 'animality is conceived as a state out of which the human must be forced, or from which it must travel, using ... the innovations of science'. However, Armstrong explains that after World War I, when technological progress appeared destructive, modernists began to see primitivism as a desirable state: 'Animality, at its most wild and untamed, was not the enemy of humanity, but its possible, perhaps its only, salvation'.⁵⁵ In *Oryx and Crake*, where progress has become unquestionably destructive, Crake embraces this view in designing the Crakers. Their 'primitive' component resonates with Atwood's discussion in *Strange Things* of a 'desire among [Canadian] non-Natives to turn themselves into Natives', deriving in part from an older tradition in which 'Indians became identified with Rousseau's "noble savage" concept, and their reputation benefited from

⁵⁴ Richard Kerridge, 'Narratives of Resignation: Environmentalism in Recent Fiction', in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. John Parnham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 92-93.

⁵⁵ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean*, 142, 143.

Romanticism generally, with its love of nature and its yen for the “primitive”. She concludes,

Perhaps the thing to do with it is ... to take it a step further: if white Canadians would adopt a more traditionally Native attitude to the natural world, a less exploitative and more respectful attitude, they might be able to reverse the galloping environmental carnage of the late twentieth century.⁵⁶

This is, of course, precisely what Crake hopes the Crakers will achieve by being more primitive. He also seems to be trying to ensure their harmlessness by making them more like other animals. His attitude recalls one expressed in Plutarch’s *That Brute Beasts Have Use of Reason*, which Erica Fudge discusses in *Brutal Reasoning*. In the dialogue, a man called Gryllus, turned into a pig by Circe, does not want to be turned back because humans are not naturally virtuous like other animals. Fudge writes, ‘To be an animal, in this text, is to be more natural and less vicious than, and thus superior to, a human’.⁵⁷

Similarly, the Crakers’ nonhuman features are what make them an improvement on humans. Crake explains to Jimmy that they are not territorial because they are herbivores (with a digestive system based on that of rabbits (158-59)), and ‘neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land’ (305). Indeed, like other nonhuman animals, they are ‘perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or, for that matter, clothing’.⁵⁸ Therefore, Crake reasons, ‘They would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms’ (305). Finally, Crake has removed what he regards as the danger of human sexuality: ‘they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man’ (305), and when they do, the females’ buttocks and stomachs turn blue, ‘a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons, with a contribution from the expandable chromatophores of the octopus’ (164). ‘Since it’s only the blue tissue and the pheromones released by it that stimulate the

⁵⁶ Atwood, *Strange Things*, 35, 39, 60.

⁵⁷ Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 90.

⁵⁸ Again, this echoes Freud, who writes: ‘If private property were abolished, all wealth held in common, and everyone allowed to share in the enjoyment of it, ill-will and hostility would disappear among men’. However, Freud also believes that ‘Aggressiveness was not created by property’. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 60.

males, there's no more unrequited love these days, no more thwarted lust' (165).⁵⁹ In the Crakers, then, the therio-primitivist ideal has become a reality. Paradoxically, however, the values informing Crake's creation of them seem entirely at odds with the values they are to embody.

Firstly, Crake's overall project in creating the Crakers is fundamentally anthropocentric in that although he eradicates humans, he also replaces them. Although he uses multiple species as the inspiration and sometimes the resources for various features of the Crakers, they are modified humans rather than anything else. The reason for this is not apparent. One of the key arguments against the idea of human extinction as an ecological solution is that it would leave no-one to minimise the ongoing impact of human technology on the environment (of nuclear energy for instance), yet the Crakers are in no way equipped to deal with such hazards. On the contrary, Snowman has to check that the children do not collect anything harmful during their beachcombing. They are not conceived of as actively solving problems, but simply as creating no more. This suggests that the replacement of humans *at all* in fact betrays an aspect of anthropocentrism at the heart of Crake's antihuman scheme, in his desire for humans to go on in some form.

The practical process of creating the Crakers is also, I would suggest, technohumanist. Crake employs the same transgenic techniques used in making the rakunks, wolvogs, ChickieNobs and pigoons; as applied to humans, this is known as transhumanism. Heidi Campbell and Mark Walker define this as 'the view that humans should (or should be permitted to) use technology to remake human nature'. They write,

It is believed that through stem cell technology, genetic engineering and nanotechnology ... we might be able to greatly enhance the healthy life span of persons, increase intelligence, and some would argue, make ourselves happier, and more virtuous... transhumanism presents a radical view of our future world: the merging of humanity with technology as the next stage of our human evolution - we have the opportunity to become something more than human.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Freud, by contrast, considered that:

If we were to remove this factor too ... we cannot, it is true, easily foresee what new paths the development of civilization could take; but one thing we can expect, and that is that this indestructible feature of human nature will follow it there

Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 61. This suggests that whereas Crake thinks removing the problem of sexual frustration will remove aggression, Freud did not.

⁶⁰ Heidi Campbell and Mark Walker, 'Religion and Transhumanism: Introducing a Conversation.' *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, 2 (2005), i. <http://jetpress.org/volume14/specialissueintro.html>.

Thus, if technohumanism means an interrelationship with technology that does not challenge but rather perpetuates and exacerbates humanism's prioritisation of humans and of progress as improvement, then transhumanism is a subset of this that involves physically enhancing the human through biotechnology. The Crakers, of course, are designed to avoid perpetuating those humanist values, but Crake's role as practitioner of transhumanism is very like that of Pitford in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*; he behaves as if his knowledge of life is such that he can rearrange it without negative consequences. However, Ted Peters warns that transgenic enhancement and transhumanism 'risk promising too much. They promise to make us into fabulous human beings ... Tacitly, they risk assigning science the job of providing the equivalent of salvation'.⁶¹ This is an apt description of the task which Crake appears to have taken upon himself; he even names his biosphere Paradise.⁶² However, the results are far from utopian. The destruction of the original humans can only be described as apocalyptic, while, though they are unaware of it themselves, the Crakers seem caged by Crake's extensive restrictions. Snowman observes that 'no *thou shalt not*s would be any good to them, or even comprehensible, because it's all built in. No point in telling them not to lie, steal, commit adultery, or covet. They wouldn't grasp the concepts' (366). Armstrong suggests that 'Atwood presents Crake's meticulous genetic programming as another form of confinement, which locks his creatures into a territorial and behavioural enclosure. The Crakers are stuck in their own ark, so to speak, which is both sanctuary and prison' (195). Ultimately, Crake is trying not just to create a species but to arrest evolution in the Crakers by removing their need for progress.

Overall, then, Crake's destruction of humans and his creation of the Crakers appears thoroughly paradoxical in humanist terms. He has no faith in humans and thinks other species are better designed in many ways, so he tries to remove humans from their centrality to history. However, he makes more humans according to transhumanist principles in which he regards himself as the ultimate master of nature and shaper of history. The one thing that might explain all these discrepancies is what Snowman

⁶¹ Ted Peters, 'Perfect Humans or Transhumans?' in *Future Perfect? God, Medicine and Human Identity*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond and Peter Manley Scott (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 16.

⁶² The word paradise is usually used to refer to either Eden or heaven, but has its origins in terms referring to enclosed gardens or royal parks, rather than to a wild or divine place. It is therefore appropriate for Crake's use for three reasons: he is pretending to create immortality (heaven); he is really creating new people (Eden); and the project is in fact far from wild and is thoroughly contained within the dome. Additionally, of course, the *-dice* of his chosen spelling points to the fact that the whole project is something of gamble.

describes as Crake's 'truly colossal ego' (321): it may be that Crake simply regards *himself* as able and entitled to improve on creation, and that both his destruction of humans and his creation of the Crakers are part of that conviction. In that case, Crake can be read as a parody of humanist exceptionality at an individual level. However, as in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, nature ultimately reclaims control, as Crake's influence wanes along with that of other humans and the post-natural world becomes literally posthuman.

In *Babies by Design*, Green writes that 'Atwood's novel criticizes our excessive love of science and our environmental intrusiveness', and he reads *Oryx and Crake* as expressing a 'fear ... that we can never retain full control of our creations'.⁶³ I want to suggest, however, that though the novel certainly conveys a fear of *scientists* getting out of control, it also celebrates the unpredictability of their creations as, like the mustelids of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, contradicting the anthropocentric denial of 'Nature's agency and independence of ends'.⁶⁴ The representation of Snowman's experience certainly reflects contemporary concerns about transgenics. Birke et al. discuss a 2001 report by Phil Macnaghten on the British public's views of biotechnology, which revealed questions about usefulness and risk:

These two dimensions often combined as concerns about violating natural boundaries and the capacity of nature to fight back with a vengeance, or that 'messing about with nature' was 'likely to rebound on humans'.⁶⁵

It certainly rebounds on Snowman. Immunised against BlyssPluss so that he can guide the Crakers, he is tortured by the fact that he has failed to understand or warn anyone about Crake's anthropocidal project (this guilt is one reason for his adoption of the name Snowman: 'He's kept the *abominable* to himself, his own secret hair shirt' (8)⁶⁶). He is also at the mercy of the transgenic animals whose behaviour is rapidly changing in their newfound freedom. Wolvogs, of course, are already programmed to be dangerous, but Snowman fears they will become more so:

⁶³ Green, *Babies by Design*, 5

⁶⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 341

⁶⁵ Birke et al., *The Sacrifice*, 183.

⁶⁶ The name is also appropriate for other reasons. It breaks Crake's Paradise rule of using only real animal names, and the Abominable Snowman appeals to Jimmy, 'flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours and through its backward pointing footprints' (7-8). Indeed, for the Crakers, he is liable to become a kind of missing link figure, like them but monstrous and mythological. He also compares himself to a real snowman in his vulnerability to the newly tropical North American environment:

Maybe he's the other kind of snowman ... the last Homo sapiens – a white illusion of a man, here today, gone tomorrow, so easily shoved over, left to melt in the sun, getting thinner and thinner until he liquefies and trickles away altogether. As Snowman is doing now. (224)

They're smart; very soon they'll sense his vulnerability, start hunting him. Once they begin he'll never be able to go anywhere, or anywhere without trees. All they'll have to do is get him out in the open, encircle him, close in for the kill. There's only so much you can do with stones and pointed sticks. (107)

These fears may well be justified, since bobkittens and the pigoons are already more dangerous than anticipated. The bobkittens, of course, begin to behave unpredictably even before the apocalypse, while the pigoons' modifications, paradoxically, accelerate their return to their wild origins. 'Pigoons were supposed to be tusk-free, but maybe they were reverting to type now they'd gone feral, a fast-forward process considering their rapid-maturity genes' (38). On the other hand, the pigoons' human component is not receding; instead, their human neocortical tissue seems to be affecting their behaviour. When this technology is first developed, Jimmy's mother comments, 'That's all we need ... More people with the brains of pigs' (56). Now, Snowman has the opposite problem: pigs thinking like humans. On a visit to the Compound, he becomes the victim of an organised hunt:

It's as if they've had it planned, between the two groups; as if they've known for some time that he was in the gatehouse and have been waiting for him to come out, far enough so they can surround him. (267)

Snowman escapes into a watchtower and is trapped there, confined by the pigoons as they were once confined by humans, and barely escapes. Human-nonhuman power relations, then, are quickly inverting, which is a disaster for Snowman, but perhaps not in terms of the novel's broader fears that a natural/divine life force is currently losing too much control to humans. The Crakers, too, support this idea. Like the transgenic animals, they start to break the restrictions that their creators sought to impose, but as those creators are humans, this does not necessarily constitute a fall, but perhaps a return to the garden.

Inspired and encouraged by Snowman, the Crakers begin to display just those characteristics that Crake sought to eradicate. Because they effectively embody the colonial stereotype of primitive innocents, Snowman finds himself in the position of the stereotypical coloniser, and indeed, a missionary or prophet in his guidance of the Crakers. Atwood is quite overt about this parallel; as Snowman is trying to relate to the Crakers, 'the book in his head' says,

When dealing with indigenous peoples ... you must attempt to respect their traditions and confine your explanations to simple concepts that can be understood within the

contexts of their belief system... If she [the author] were here she'd need a whole new take on *indigenous*. (97)

His most exploitative colonisation of the Crakers is making them kill fish, fitting his needs into their belief system but certainly not in a way that respects it. Snowman knows that Oryx has told the Crakers not to hurt other animals, because 'If things had gone as Crake wanted, there would be no more such killing – no more human predation' (101), but he claims that Crake has spoken to him (through his watch) and ordained that he should receive a cooked fish each week.⁶⁷

More often, however, Snowman's relation to the Crakers recalls MaddAddam's relation to other animals: he manipulates them only to encourage and advance their unwitting transgressions. This pattern originates with the Crakers' own existential curiosity, which Crake tried to eradicate but which Snowman is inclined to foster. Even while Oryx is still instructing them, she reports, 'they asked who made them ... I said it was Crake' (311), and when they ask him more questions, Snowman builds on this, inventing a myth in which they are the Children of Crake and animals are the Children of Oryx:

In the beginning, there was chaos ... The people in the chaos were full of chaos themselves, and the chaos made them do bad things. They were killing other people all the time. And they were eating up all the Children of Oryx ... And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away. (102-03)

Snowman's stories are somewhat problematic in that they repeat humans' conceptual binaries, separating human(oid) from nonhuman and gendering that distinction. While the Crakers are constructed by Crake from coral and mango, the animals 'hatched out of ... a giant egg laid by Oryx herself' (96).⁶⁸ The natural and female even appears as a resource, in the sense that Oryx lays another egg of words, which only the Crakers get to eat. In this sense, then, the binaries of the religion Snowman offers are built along the lines of humanist distinctions. On the other hand, Snowman is constructing an aetiology which glorifies the female as well as the male, and fosters respect for nature, language

⁶⁷ As part of this, Snowman also tells the Crakers that they should return the fish bones to the sea, so that Oryx can make more; this gives the Crakers a basic story of an afterlife (reincarnation) and a basic funerary ritual for animals.

⁶⁸ The novel does not explore the Crakers' own interpretation of these points, but this could cause other prohibited behaviours if they take the story too literally. None of them dies in the narrative, but if they believe that they are really made of coral and mango, they might take each other's bones to the sea, as Snowman has told them to do with the fish bones, developing the funerary practices which Crake tried to rule out.

and Oryx herself, all of which were presented as violated by the anthropocentric humanism and technohumanism displayed by original humans. However, these points reveal more about Snowman than the Crakers. The greater challenge to Crake's authority is not that Snowman gets them to think in religious ways, but that they have the capacity to do so. Moreover, they then start to develop beliefs independently of Snowman's influence.

As they speak of Crake with increasing admiration, Snowman is jealous but also pleased, because 'Crake was against the notion of God, or gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification' (103-04). Then, apparently inspired by Snowman's claims of speaking with Crake, the Craker women begin to talk about communing with Oryx: after driving an aggressive bobkitten away with stones, they decide, 'Tonight we will apologize to Oryx ... And we will request her to tell her children not to bite us' (157). Snowman, who never witnesses this, supposes that

They must perform some kind of prayer or invocation, since they can hardly believe that Oryx appears to them in person ... They're up to something ... something Crake didn't anticipate: they're conversing with the invisible, they're developing reverence. Good for them... He likes it when Crake is proved wrong. (157)

The Crakers are also inspired by Snowman's use of 'pictures' in his storytelling, such as sand and water mixed to represent chaos: 'They'd struggled with pictures, at first – flowers on beach-trash lotion bottles, fruits on juice cans. But now they appear to have grasped the concept' (102). It is here that Atwood shows the Crakers coming to grips with representation, a concept which is of course central to the medium of fiction too. According to Crake, 'Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall ... Next they'd be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war' (361). However, the Crakers reach the deceptively simple conclusion that '*Not real can tell us about real*' (102). That they can grasp this suggests that Crake, in his rationalism, has underestimated the human capacity for symbolic thought, and so perhaps its value. Additionally, the Crakers' formulation of the concept expresses just what a novel like *Oryx and Crake* tries to do. Fiction – the 'not real' – can tell us about 'real'; in this case, the futuristic scenario is intended to warn 'us' (in the present) about the dangers of making assumptions like Crake's.

Finally, the Crakers actively undermine Crake's technohumanism by putting pictures and mythology together, entirely of their own accord: Snowman discovers them chanting

his name to an effigy they have made 'to help us send out our voices to you' (361). They thus have developed a complex concept of communion through representation, which they should be entirely incapable of doing. Although, as is the case in *Life of Pi*, religion and humanism can be compatible, the Crakers' development of religion appears to be regarded in positive anti-humanist terms in *Oryx and Crake*. Anthropocentrism and technohumanism are presented as violating religion and respect for nature, as epitomised by Crake in his attempt to play and to erase God, whereas the Crakers, with Snowman's help, undermine both aspects of Crake's arrogant ideas. In these ways, the Crakers, like the bobkittens, wolvgos and pigoons, transgress the boundaries supposedly imposed by science, implying that even in a world where extensive biotechnological modification is possible, some life force remains unconquered, just as it did in the nineteenth-century context of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*. This point is also underscored, somewhat more ambiguously, by the survival of other humans besides Snowman.

During Snowman's scavenging trip to the Compounds, he finds a radio and hears other isolated humans who have also managed to escape the JUVE virus. When he returns to the Crakers, they tell him that there are two men and a woman nearby. Though Snowman is pleased by the Crakers' human characteristics, he is very concerned by the survival of fully human beings. Worried that they might kill him (or perhaps that he might die of an infection in his foot), he wants to warn the Crakers about violence, rape, molestation or slavery (367); he obviously fears that more than his own cultural colonisations might be reproduced in human-Craker relations. In this sense, the problems of how to negotiate cultural and species differences (which are almost the same thing where they concern the Crakers) have added urgency as the novel ends. On the other hand, however, the survival of humans, like the behaviour of the bobkittens, pigoons and Crakers, is another contradiction of Crake's dismissal of nature and God; again, some such force is escaping the confines of zoo or church and reclaiming control over life. Some hope therefore remains, if not for Crake's vision, then for his pretended goal of fewer, less destructive humans. Together, they and the Crakers could still become the sort of the post-catastrophe community which Kerridge describes, made up of people who have learned enough from the past not to repeat its mistakes. Caught between these two possibilities, Snowman limps along the beach towards the other humans, armed and knowing that they are also armed, not knowing whether they are friend or foe. Ending the narrative here, Atwood ultimately refuses to answer this question, leaving it for the present to answer.

Conclusion

Oryx and Crake's pre- and post-apocalyptic worlds, then, provide a futuristic perspective on the sorts of questions raised by *Disgrace*, *Life of Pi*, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and *The Hunter*. Atwood offers a warning about future evolutions of imperialism and anthropocentrism, imagining a centralised globalisation from which Canada is conspicuously absent, where transgenic hybridisation and xenotransplantation have become the norm, and where a rogue scientist might obliterate human life. Thus, if *The Hunter* undermines the idea of philosophical progress to date, *Oryx and Crake* paints future technological progress as thoroughly dystopian. The modes of resistance explored in the novel, however, include the opposition to anthropocentrism on the part of certain characters that also features in each of the other novels, and the conception of animal agency that appears in *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*. *Oryx and Crake* also offers an additional contribution, however, in that it is the only one of the novels under discussion to unite these two forms of resistance in the human recognition and promotion of other species' disruptiveness. That alliance is not very successful, but later nature's influence on the Crakers, who already literally combine humans and other species, helps them cast off some of the restrictions that have been imposed on them, so the alliance is arguably successful there to an extent. Overall, *Oryx and Crake*'s version of the postcolonial challenge to humanism that is my focus here lies somewhere between those of *The Hunter* and *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*. As in *The Hunter*, technology-enhanced anthropocentrism and the prioritisation of the global is criticised as destructive, causing mass extinctions rather than a single one and considerable imbalances in cultural power. However, like *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *Oryx and Crake* also illustrates the limits to humans' power over nature, showing that they are not as masterful as they believe themselves to be. Of all the novels I address, then, *Oryx and Crake* perhaps most fully realises both the cultural and ecological threats of technologically enhanced humanism or technohumanism, and what I call the species posthumanist perspective in which humans are regarded as interwoven with other animals.

Conclusion: challenging humanism

Because this thesis has been concerned with a very small sample of literature concentrating on specific themes, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the shape of contemporary white postcolonial fiction in general on the basis of what is here. However, from the analysis of the novels that have been addressed, commonalities emerge which suggest the existence of certain threads running through that literature where animals are a focus. I have suggested that all five novels are united by their contestation of aspects humanist discourse, such as the conceptual privileging of the western, male, rationalist and human in its construction of figure of 'man', which can be seen to inform the historical imperialism and contemporary globalisation against which white postcolonial societies variously seek to define themselves. In the novels I have addressed, connections between imperialism or globalisation and anthropocentrism are often underscored, and an adherence to detached rationalism over emotion is seen as contrary to animal and often human interests. Animals, however, are also presented as having disruptive power, on conceptual or practical levels or both. Thinking seriously about animals often affects the attitudes of individual human characters in one way or another. Additionally, although animals' actions do not necessarily assist human attempts at resistance or even serve their own best interests, they often directly, if accidentally, disrupt anthropocentric and imperialistic or globalising endeavours. In each novel, then, animals are of interest not because their situations are identical or even (necessarily) parallel to those of humans, but because they appear to challenge the same discourses that white postcolonial cultures seek to resist. These features of their attention to animals unite the novels despite their various origins and their sometimes considerable differences of approach.

Anti-humanism and posthumanism

Partly due to their specific cultural concerns, the challenge to humanism is articulated slightly differently in each novel. These differences are particularly apparent in the contrast between *Disgrace* and *Life of Pi* drawn in my first two chapters. *Disgrace* concentrates on the need for white humility in the new post-apartheid South Africa, and animals are connected to this in ways that challenge anthropocentrism alongside

Eurocentrism and racism. Lurie, who can be seen to embody humanist values at first, is set against his more ethically engaged daughter, Lucy, who offers a counterfocalizing figure for the narrative. Implicitly, Coetzee draws parallels between racism and speciesism, particularly in Lurie's comment that humans are 'Not higher, necessarily, just different' (74), a formulation that seems more than coincidentally reminiscent of the United States segregation catch phrase, 'separate but equal'. Lurie only grudgingly accepts Lucy's insistent humility in response to racial conflict, but he becomes keenly aware that his own Europeanising is irrelevant in South Africa. In relation to animals, in a process catalysed by his daily contact with them, Lurie develops a sense of responsibility resembling that modelled by Lucy and Bev. The novel thus appears to advocate white (secular) humility in the new South Africa, and the sort of relativising of humans and other animals which I am calling species posthumanism. While they are not solutions, these attitudes are presented as helping to navigate and perhaps to avoid exacerbating problems in terms of species and race relations.

Life of Pi's cultural focus is a celebration of multiculturalism in India and, to an extent, Canada. Martel uses animals' disruptions of categories in ways which can be seen to parallel the cultural border-crossings effected by the characters as part of postcolonial hybridity. However, notions of human exceptionality are not drawn into question. As I explained in the introduction and chapter two, decolonising cultures cannot necessarily afford to abandon their assertion of a subject status previously denied them, because the possession such status remains significant in practice. Whether for this reason or another, *Life of Pi* does not question human-nonhuman distinctions. Instead, its challenge to humanism is to rationalism only. The novel thus tries to undermine what is arguably the theoretical basis for humanism while retaining the ideologies of human distinctiveness and superiority and asserting them through the subordination of animals. I suggested that this approach can therefore be seen as a version of Althusser's concept of 'theoretical anti-humanism'.

Mr Allbones' Ferrets concerns the nineteenth-century European settlers of New Zealand. It distances contemporary Pakeha culture from their attitudes by approaching them with irony, representing their anthropocentric beliefs in European superiority and rationalist mastery as not only imperialistic but mistaken. This point is made through

evidence of the human characters' own physical vulnerability, sexuality and fertility, but also through animals' disruptions of colonial endeavours. However, perhaps partly because the historical content makes the outcome a foregone conclusion, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* show that humans are subject to nature without suggesting that this solves anything; at best, the novel implies that contemporary awareness could improve current or future human-animal relations.

The Hunter and *Oryx and Crake* have related cultural concerns despite their different contexts, in that they speculate about present Australian and future Canadian relations to global influences. *The Hunter* warns that historical imperialism and assumptions about human mastery survive in the present in the form of multinational organisations and anthropocentric technology. The biotechnology corporation prioritises international power over the local and over animals, while the representation of technology itself resonates with N. Katherine Hayles' observation that technological posthumanism can perpetuate anthropocentric values,¹ in the form of technohumanism. What I call species posthumanism also appears in this novel in the form of the deep-ecological philosophy of Jarrah Armstrong and his environmentalist friends. However, Jarrah is dead and his vision does not survive him. Instead, the logic of the environmentalists' 'indistinguishability account' is drawn into question, especially in relation to extinction. The rationality that M believes himself to possess is undermined by his emotional response to the Armstrong family and to the thylacine, but his initial view of himself as triumphing over emotion and over animals eventually dominates. Thus, the concept of humans' superior power is not presented as *untrue* in this novel, but as resulting in tragedy.

Oryx and Crake takes these problems a step further again. The humanist notion of progress as improvement is thoroughly undermined by Atwood's futuristic dystopia. However, although the privileging of the western, the rational and the human is again presented as destructive, posthumanist interconnections between human and nonhuman increase the power of the dominant group as well as contributing to the resistance to it. Because the technology central to *Oryx and Crake* is *biotechnology*, the difference

¹ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 287.

between technological and species posthumanism blurs as biological interrelationships between species are exploited via transgenics to produce hybrid animals-as-instruments, including animals with human cells to be used for xenotransplantation. *Oryx and Crake* thus emphasises that the dismantlement of human species boundaries might not impede anthropocentric interests at all, and could even facilitate their pursuit.

All five novels, then, are united not only by their white postcolonial origins and their attention to nonhuman animals, but through a common opposition to aspects of humanist discourse, whether they offer a limited, theoretical anti-humanism like *Life of Pi*'s anti-rationalism, or a more extensive opposition to the concepts of human and western superiority like that offered by *Disgrace*. In making these challenges to humanism, the novels can also be seen to engage with broader social, ideological and literary concerns which extend beyond their specific cultural contexts, to do with the negotiation of the kinds of difference which humanist discourse reinforces.

In *Disgrace* and *Life of Pi*, this involves exploring ideas about how cultures and species should live with one another. *Disgrace* foregrounds problems to do with animal welfare in terms of both companion and meat animals which obviously extend beyond its immediate South African context. Similarly, its advocacy of humility and acceptance in relation to both animals and post-apartheid race relations has a more widespread application as a means of approaching the goal of sharing life. *Life of Pi* concentrates on cultural hybridity as a creative and positive response to cultural juxtapositions, although in its response to questions about how humans should regard their relationship with animals, its promotion of an admiration that maintains the status quo seems quite a conservative answer compared with *Disgrace*'s.

Mr Allbones' Ferrets, *The Hunter* and *Oryx and Crake* can all be seen to share more widespread concerns about globalisation and extinction. They present the prioritisation of European and global interests as an ideology against which white postcolonial cultures, but by extension other marginalised cultures, must define themselves, in establishing distance from colonial history and/or in defending local resources or cultural specificity against assimilation by larger international powers. The impact of imperialistic or global perspectives on animals is also a problem with widespread relevance. *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and *Oryx and Crake* take a largely

ecocentric approach to the threat of extinction; that is, they pay more attention to the scale of the problem than to its impact on individual animals. *The Hunter*, in its concentration on a single surviving member of a species, presents the threat through a more biocentric attention to the fate of individual animals. These three novels, then, are less concerned with issues like the killing of companion animals and the welfare of meat animals that *Disgrace* confronts, but they can be seen to advocate, at a broader environmentalist level, a similar concept of life as shared by humans and other animals to that which Lucy promotes and Lurie appears to adopt.

The novels can also be seen to engage with general questions about the role of literature in the negotiation of difference. Fiction offers a space in which to explore scenarios, and this can provide ways of experimenting with or putting forward alternative or hypothetical responses to real problems of cultural or species relations. Literature's potential in this respect is most explicitly addressed in *Disgrace*. Here, as elsewhere in his work, Coetzee raises questions about the responsibilities and limitations of fiction, and uses the conflicting opinions of his characters to explore controversial questions without providing definitive answers. Additionally, through Lurie's contemplation of including a dog in his opera, Coetzee also raises self-referent questions about the place of animals in fiction. Unlike *Disgrace*, *Life of Pi* does not examine authorial responsibilities, but it too includes direct comments about literature. These occur in the frame narrator's remarks about writing and the purpose of fiction, which he says is to twist reality to bring out its essence, and of course in Pi's emphasis on 'the better story,' by which he means imaginative storytelling that gives his experiences meaning. This is the reason for Pi's and by extension Martel's narration of a story with animals, so this is also *Life of Pi*'s answer to the question of animals' place in literature. *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* and *The Hunter* are less explicit on the subject of literature, but they do make certain points about it. Farrell foregrounds the incomplete distinction between fiction and history, including people's names and real events within the narrative, but showing how those people might have fictionalised the historical record. *The Hunter* also questions the reliability of accepted history, most directly through M's comment, 'There is always new history to be made' (37), and through Leigh's own fictional 'remaking' of history to create a cautionary scenario. In *Oryx and Crake*,

Atwood is more overt about the same use of a fictional scenario to, as the Crakers put it, 'tell us about real', and specifically to warn the present about what is already 'real'.

In various ways, then, the novels participate in wider explorations of issues of culture, environmentalism, animal studies and welfare, and about the role of literature within the negotiation of difference in those areas. Indeed, sensitivity to those larger concerns can be seen to inform another common feature of their representation of anti- and posthumanism: all the novels convey doubts about whether challenges to humanism can actually achieve the desired results.

Most of the novels regard the abandonment of humanist paradigms as a potential solution, because if maintaining the humanist subject is no longer the priority, this might facilitate more positive cultural and species relations. However, the novels all convey doubts as to the likely success of such ideas. In *Life of Pi*, this is because the humanist subject is still seen as valuable, so to abandon it in its entirety would not constitute success. In the other novels, however, the caution about presenting anti- or posthumanism as solutions may be attributable to an awareness of the complexity of cultural and environmental problems and the responsibilities of fiction in responding to them: in other words, the novels seem wary of oversimplifications and complacency.

In his discussion of environmentalist 'narratives of resignation' Richard Kerridge suggests:

In part, the problem is that conventional plot structures require forms of solution and closure that seem absurdly evasive when applied to ecological questions with their extremes of timescale and complexities of interdependency. And that is the challenge for novelists and ecocritical theorists of narrative, if we are to have environmentalist novels that do not take failure for granted.²

Although they are not all concerned with environmentalist issues, if the novels that I have addressed were to present resistance to humanism as a straightforward solution, this could similarly trivialise the problems with which they are engaging. On the other hand, to convey hopelessness would be to invite apathy and might thus become self-fulfilling. Ideally, then, catastrophe must be presented as a preventable, worst case

² Richard Kerridge, 'Narratives of Resignation: Environmentalism in Recent Fiction,' in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. John Parham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 87, 99.

scenario. This is not always the case in the novels in question here, but all five avoid presenting opposition to humanism as a complete solution, and all locate some degree of hope in animals or nature as having power to resist.

Life of Pi and *Disgrace* represent *some* aspects of opposition to humanism as effective. *Life of Pi* is wary about challenges to human exceptionalism: when in Pi's second story, he performs Richard Parker's brutal actions from the first, the threat to Pi's humanity is regarded negatively and this story is not seen to fulfil the meaning-giving purpose of fiction. However, the repression of that narrative reinstates Richard Parker as the killer of the French cook (he does so twice, if this figure is represented by the hyena as well as the French castaway), deflecting blame which otherwise accrues to Pi. The meerkats in particular are also presented as remarkable in ways that defy rationalist explanation. In these ways, animals are a significant factor in Pi's victory in the debate about 'the better story', and so in *Life of Pi*'s overriding optimism. However, its solutions can be seen as evasive in that they are arguably achieved by refusing to engage with problems about human-animal relations. In *Disgrace*, the success of the species-posthumanist sharing of life that Lucy promotes is limited by the scale of the obstacles to it. Individual humans struggle to negotiate post-apartheid tensions, and are unable to solve the problems of too many unwanted animals or too much meat consumption. However, the novel does show how experience of animals can affect someone: abandoning his default position that humans are a different order of being, Lurie comes to feel that animals are deserving of basic respect from humans. He moves Petrus's sheep so that they can drink and graze, and even honours the corpses of dogs. Additionally, rather than amounting to a criticism, his view of Lucy's decision to submit to Petrus as 'like a dog' may facilitate his acceptance of it (205), despite the enduring question in the novel as to whether her choice is the right one. The novel's attention to personal ethical development, then, allows more scope for success than its engagement with larger problems, so that in Lurie at least, both human-animal and South African cultural relations are presented as works in very slow progress.

The other novels place little faith in personal development or larger scale solutions, but they also avoid presenting animals as altogether helpless. All express reservations about the effectiveness of conservationist values in response to

anthropocentric science. In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Allbones expresses regret when extinction is explained to him, while Pitford, an expert on the subject, sends mustelids to New Zealand. In demonstrating that neither knowledge nor concern is sufficient on its own, the novel gives some idea of the complexities of the contexts in which extinctions occur. Moreover, this novel *cannot* offer solutions because it concerns a history of imperialism and extinction which fiction cannot undo without trivialising it. However, some animals offer resistance to human mastery. Individual animals bite, scratch and soil humans, while mustelids (and nightingales) defy human expectations in New Zealand. Although this resulted in tragedy for the bird species affected, some optimism can be derived from the idea that animals do have power to hinder anthropocentric projects. In *The Hunter*, M's successful hunt is a triumph of human supremacy, international interests and anthropocentric technology over interconnections between species, local interests, and conservationism. Biotechnology's recuperative potential – M knows that a sperm can be made from the thylacine's own blood (166) – is subordinated to the ends of biological warfare. However, while there can be no hope for the thylacine, she impedes M where little else does, by accidentally or deliberately evading him and unknowingly influencing his feelings enough to delay his fatal shot. In *Oryx and Crake* technology that could be used to preserve or perhaps even re-establish animal species is again redirected, and in this case used to make new ones to serve human ends. Ecological crises appear to have led to the assimilation of Canada, while a global capitalism in which North America dominates has exacerbated international inequalities. Resistance movements are presented as marginalised and ineffective. However, the novel does leave room for the possibility that its worst case scenario could still be avoided, and it emphasises the overall capacity of 'nature', in the sense of a nonhuman influence on living things, to persist despite anthropocentrism, biotechnological manipulation, and even dramatic climate change and extinctions.

All the novels, then, include challenges to humanist discourse which can be seen to have a wider relevance to social and ideological concerns about the negotiation of differences, between cultures and between the human and the nonhuman, and about the role of literature in such negotiations. Sensitivity to the scale of these larger problems or about the role of fiction can also be seen to inflect the novels' avoidance of presenting

challenges to humanism as triumphing, although some hope is often expressed in relation to animals or nature. The representation of animals in *Life of Pi* challenges narrow-minded rationalism while working to maintain Pi's human status, while in the other novels, animals certainly do not have *enough* power to effect change, but they are not entirely passive victims. In these ways, the novels present animals as meriting attention from multiple perspectives for the challenges they pose to humanism. More broadly, the treatment of animals facilitates exploration of what dispensing with humanism *could* or *should* mean, and what the obstacles are. Before offering a final evaluation of the results of the alliance between white postcolonial cultures and animals, I want briefly to explore how these novels use animals to explore what the abandonment of humanist paradigms might mean in terms of two other recurring themes: gender relations and religion.

Gender and religion

The novels are united by other several thematic commonalities besides those on which I have concentrated in this thesis, and two that recur with significant frequency are gender and religion, which each appear in four of the five texts. Some similarities in these areas have already been touched on in the preceding chapters, but it is possible now that all of the texts have been examined to assess the nature of these overlaps and their relationship to the themes of species and humanism that are my focus.

If comparisons between women and animals are, like those between slaves and animals made by Marjorie Spiegel, in any sense 'dreaded',³ it is because they reinforce the binaries between male/female and human/nature that contribute to the definition of the humanist subject and the marginalisation of its perceived others. Val Plumwood writes, 'that women's inclusion in the sphere of nature has been a major tool in their oppression emerges clearly from a glance at traditional sources... Feminine "closeness to nature" has hardly been a complement'. The challenge for critical ecofeminism, then, is to find 'a route of escape from the problematic that the traditional association between women and nature creates for feminists, to a position which neither accepts women's

³ Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (New York: Mirror Books, 1996).

exclusion from reason nor accepts the construction of nature as inferior'.⁴ As with postcolonial-animal connections, then, the female-nature association might be understood as helpful or harmful, depending on how it is represented. The relationship between species and gender relations in these novels often involves parallels between women and animal as victims, but it also serves to question the implications of those parallels, for animals, women and men.

In *Disgrace*, the theme of sexual exploitation is more obviously tied to cultural relations than to species relations, but it is, as I noted in chapter one, framed by animal imagery. Lurie's invasion of Soraya and Melanie's lives is suggestive of imperialism, and arguably, because the mature Lurie teaches the young Melanie about European literature, and because her retaliation forces him to resign this post, their relationship might be read as a parallel to the relationship between Europe and its former colony, South Africa. Lurie's diminishing sexual needs might also be read as a metaphor for this cultural situation. It is not until he acknowledges the changes in both areas that he begins to develop respect for the white, middle-aged Bev, with whom he develops an eventually asexual relationship. The role of animals in connection with these relationships changes too: whereas Lurie uses predation metaphors to conceptualise his actions towards Soraya and Melanie, his relationship with Bev is framed by the realities of animals' lives and deaths in the clinic. Indeed, in their role as carers for animals, Lucy and Bev both occupy traditional female positions in relation to real animals, which Lurie first derides and then comes to share. In other respects, however, Lucy is not typically female until her rape forces her, on several levels, to become so. At first independent and possibly lesbian, Lurie speculates that she is raped as a punishment for these points as well as for racial reasons. Literalising the connections informing sorts of metaphors criticised by Carol Adams,⁵ Lucy's rape is also associated with the 'butchering' of animals as the dogs in the kennels are slaughtered as part of the attack. Finally, defined by her biology too, Lucy finds she is pregnant from the rape, and chooses to assume the traditional female roles of mother and (unofficially) Petrus's wife. In *Disgrace*, then associations between women and animals tend to emphasise

⁴ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 19, 20.

⁵ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 4.

victimhood, culminating in Lurie's simile between Lucy's lack of property, rights or dignity with the position of a dog.

In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, the characters can in various ways be likened to those of *Disgrace* in terms of gender themes. As I noted in chapter three, Allbones and Eugenia break with the traditional gendering of detachment and care in relation to animals. Eugenia kills insects and philosophises while Allbones, like Lurie at the end of *Disgrace*, is comfortable with expressing liking for animals and regret about their deaths. Pitford, meanwhile, is more like Lurie's earlier self. His exploitation of a much younger female protégée might again be interpreted as a parallel to the empire's exploitation of the colony, which in turn suggests a parallel between Eugenia and her grandfather's avian victims in New Zealand. The Pitfords' grandparent-grandchild relationship might also echo that between past and present. Whereas Coetzee problematises such parallels by making them explicitly and by inverting them in Lucy's rape, it is not clear whether Farrell is using them self-consciously. There is certainly a parallel, though, between Pitford's various actions, and if he sees them as natural, that explanation would resemble Lurie's presentation of his relationship with Melanie as the result of instinct. Meanwhile, for Eugenia even more than for *Disgrace*'s Lucy, pregnancy spells an end to her autonomy and she is married off to Allbones. Thus, as applied to a woman, the novel's message that humans are subject to nature somewhat problematically situates Eugenia in the conventional roles she has hitherto avoided, as if they are her inevitable fate.

In terms of the abandonment of the humanist subject, then, *Disgrace* and *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* can be seen to emphasise that this needs to include dispensing with the privileging of the masculine, so that women remain in control of what happens to their bodies rather than being victimised and then defined by their procreative role. However, Lurie and Allbones at least do not appear much inhibited by the idea that caring for animals might seem unmanly. This is more of a problem in *The Hunter*.

The Hunter, like *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, opposes male to female and science to nature. Only Jarrah Armstrong challenges these oppositions through his work as a naturalist, and he is dead. The cross-dressing of the other main male environmentalist character, Free, feminises his role as carer and this alienates M, so that, as I suggested in

chapter four, the persistent gendering of an association with nature as feminine seems to be criticised for impeding the development of the kind of ‘ecomasculinism’ that Jarrah apparently embodied. In terms of M’s relationships with others, the traditional binaries are indirect, but present. There are no instances of sexual exploitation in the novel, but he is dishonest with both Lucy and her daughter Sass (his manipulation of Sass could also be read as a parallel to the secret globalising exploitation of Australia by the biotechnology company). Lucy and Sass are not directly associated with the thylacine or with nature, but M lies to them in order to facilitate the hunt. Similarly, although M is not pursuing the thylacine *because* she is female, he is the male hunter of a female victim, and his impulse to care for the dead body (like the *mother* of a murder victim (165)) is repressed during an appropriation of her reproductive organs which clearly perpetuates male technology / female nature binaries. This novel, then, emphasises the need to dispense with these divisions as part of the opposition to humanism so that caring for nature ceases to be seen as the exclusive province of women.

Oryx and Crake presents male/female and human/nature binaries differently, in that they are not necessarily disadvantageous to women. Jimmy’s mother Sharon is associated with nature because she condemns interference with it. However, she moves in the opposite direction to Eugenia and *Disgrace*’s Lucy. Indeed, she can be seen as something of an ecofeminist heroine, escaping her roles as wife and mother and liberating Jimmy’s (female) rakunk Killer, before joining a resistance movement. Meanwhile, female children are sexually exploited in pornography watched alongside violence to animals on the internet, and Oryx, who may have been one of these girls, is animalised as part of Jimmy’s exoticisation of her appearance. However, when (as Snowman) he reinstates the human/animal binary for the Crakers, he also genders it in a way that deifies Oryx as a nature goddess: he says that the Crakers were made by Crake whereas other animals hatched from an egg laid by Oryx. In this novel, then, the interaction between species and gender themes foregrounds and explores the traditional association between the female and the natural, but it is not seen in such negative terms, implying that it has been revalued to the point that it is worth retaining when other humanist concepts are not.

The one novel that does not include any explicit treatment of gender themes is *Life of Pi*. Indeed, with the exception of Pi's mother and some brief appearances by his wife and daughter in the frame narrative, there are no significant female humans, and Orange Juice, the only female animal in the lifeboat, seems to be female largely so that she can be blurred, in Pi's second narrative, with the character of his mother. This is a surprising omission for Martel, given that the theme of gender is the driving force in his previous novel, *Self*, a narrative of repeated gender metamorphosis reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.⁶ There too, however, the masculine is arguably dominant in that, unlike Orlando, the protagonist goes from male to female and back again. In the focus on male characters in *Life of Pi*, masculinity is neither threatened nor asserted to the same extent as human superiority, but the retention of the traditional humanist concentration on the male might be seen as paralleling the retention of humanist human superiority, in contrast to the other novels' questioning of both.

The second commonality that I want to address is the theme of religion, which again features in four of the five novels. *Disgrace*, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *Life of Pi* and *Oryx and Crake* can all be seen to explore the question of how religious ideas apply in the context of their various anti- or posthumanist goals, whether they try to dispense with rationalism and categorisation only, or to promote a more extensive redefinition of what it means to be human.

Religion features within the language and symbolism of *Disgrace* to an extent that cannot be fully evaluated here, but most importantly for my purposes, Lurie's disgrace and his subsequent service to animals raise concepts of sin and atonement, even though he is wary of reading them in this way. In relation to animals, the theme of religion can be understood as having two facets. One of these is Lurie's frequent use of religious terms. The inferiority of animal souls, a concept that he borrows from 'The Church Fathers' (probably Aquinas, as I suggested in chapter two) is used as a distinction between humans and other species. In his response to Bev's work at the clinic, Lurie juxtaposes her very practical relation to animals with 'the story of – who was it? St Hubert? – who gave refuge to a deer that came clattering into his chapel ...

⁶ Yann Martel. *Self*. (London: Faber, 1996). Virginia Woolf *Orlando* (1928; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

fleeing the huntsman's dogs'(84).⁷ These sorts of references, like the animal metaphors and classicising imagery, contribute to the impression that Lurie conceptualises life in abstract terms. However, he is obviously not religious. When Melanie's father speaks to him in religious terms, he replies, 'I will have to translate what you call God and God's wishes into my own terms. In my own terms, I am being punished... I am sunk into a state of disgrace' (172). Derek Attridge suggests that this phrase 'clearly evokes the theological notion of a "state of grace," the name for a condition of receptiveness to the divine' (182). However, Lurie reconceptualises that idea in secular terms: 'It is not a punishment I have refused. I do not murmur against it. On the contrary, I am living it out, from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being' (172). In doing so, he seems more receptive to Bev's implication, which he initially dismisses as new-age nonsense, that humans might have responsibilities to animals and that neither humans nor animals are prepared for death without being escorted. Lurie slowly combines his abstractions with this perspective to arrive at ideals that he actually lives by. He offers animals love as he escorts them to their deaths and tries to accord them dignity afterwards, even though he continues to think about this in European religious terms, casting himself as a psychopomp as distinct from a saviour (146).⁸ After eating mutton, he even decides to ask forgiveness, of whom or what he does not specify. Although the death of the sheep has overtones of religious sacrifice, it is most important as representing the fate of meat-animals in general. This suggests that it might best be read in relation to sacrifice as Derrida uses the term, in relation to the conceptual subordination of animals to anthropocentric ends, and this might be why Lurie feels he should ask forgiveness. In these ways, then, *Disgrace* uses religious concepts to frame the repositioning of human-animal relations that occurs as part of Lurie's personal development as an ethical one.

Mr Allbones' Ferrets also uses religious references this way, concentrating on Genesis. First, in the woods at dawn, Allbones imagines that 'this is the Eden time, and ... he, Allbones, is the first man' (21). Extracts from Genesis also associate the voyage

⁷ St Hubert is more commonly said to have encountered a deer with a crucifix in its horns, and devoted himself to God as a result.

⁸ A psychopomp is a guide for the souls of the dead; for instance, Charon, in Greek mythologies, ferries souls into Hades.

with Noah's Ark, and raise the idea that animal lives are in human hands.⁹ However, Allbones does not have much religious education and instead treats animals according to his own sense of right and wrong. In this sense, his approach is not dissimilar to that of the characters in *Disgrace*. He does not have the same ideas about what constitutes right and wrong: he does not feel that he must justify or ask forgiveness for meat-eating. However, Allbones feels a sense of obligation to care for the mustelids and like Lurie, he accords their bodies a certain dignity after death, not feeding them to each other but dropping them into the sea like human corpses. In these two novels, then, personal relations with animals are not strictly religious, but they are informed by the characters' sense of morality, which in both novels works to suggest that humans might have obligations to animals of some kind.

In *Life of Pi*, religion is presented quite differently. Firstly, this novel is concerned with multiple religions. Like *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *Life of Pi* includes details that can be connected to Eden and the ark: to Pi the zoo is 'paradise on earth' (14), which may refer to either Eden or heaven, and the voyage connects the *Tsimtsum* and the lifeboat with the ark. However, the name *Tsimtsum* seems to be inspired by the Kabbalistic term *tzimtzum*, the name for the retraction of God's light in order to create a space in which creation could occur. Next, in the process called *shevirat ha-kelim*, God began to pour his light into the vessels he had created but they broke apart. The third step in the process, *tikkun*, is the process of recovering the shattered fragments of God's power.¹⁰ Pi himself does not make much of these points: he refers to studying the Kabbalistic teachings of Isaac Luria later in his life, but does not comment on the name of the *Tsimtsum* (3). However, Martel is arguably suggesting through the name of the ship that its sinking might be read in relation to *shevirat*, and therefore that Pi's subsequent struggle to survive is a process of *tikkun*, of recovering fragments of the divine. Indeed, all three of Pi's own religions come into play during his voyage. He likens the sea creatures under the raft to angels (198), he sees Richard Parker display 'Such a mix of ease and concentration, such a being-in-the-present' as 'would be the

⁹ Genesis 9.1-2, in Farrell, 134

¹⁰ See Byron L. Sherwin, *Kabbalah: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

envy of the highest yogis' (182), and praises Allah during an electrical storm, saying to Richard Parker, 'This is miracle. This is an outbreak of divinity' (233). These are all small details which seem little more than turns of phrase, yet they are consistent with a religious theme in which nature is constructed as evidence of divinity, which might again suggest that they are holy fragments which Pi is gathering together. Pi's faith is most threatened by the carnivorousness of the island, where he feels he would live a life of spiritual death, and by the second story, where there is no Richard Parker and Pi displays 'evil' (311). However, this story ends with the words, 'I turned to God. I survived' (311). In this way, religion is seen to overcome even the threat to Pi's human distinctiveness from Richard Parker. The interviewers' acceptance of the first, remarkable story over this one is also seen as promoting belief. Although their debate is not explicitly about religion, the implication of the remarkable 'better story' (with animals) is that it gives meaning to human life. This inverts the connection in *Disgrace* and *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, in which religion frames ideas about how animals should be regarded: here, animals instead frame ideas about belief.

The association between the natural and the divine that appears in *Life of Pi* is also made in *Oryx and Crake*. This novel's approach to religion lies somewhere between those of *Life of Pi* and *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*. *Oryx and Crake* presents nature and God as related or indistinguishable forces, echoing Atwood's own 'pessimistic pantheism', according to which 'God is everywhere, but losing'.¹¹ In the novel, God/nature is losing to technohumanism: scientists' power over biology has become such that they 'feel like God' (51). Later, Crake dismisses both God and Nature 'with a capital N' (206), and arrogantly names his biosphere 'Paradise'. However, other characters in the novel appear to hold similar views to Atwood. In particular, Sharon comes to regard biotechnological interference as 'sacrilegious' (57), and environmentalist activist groups go by the names of God's Gardeners and MaddAddam. As I suggested in chapter five, the novel also implies that God/nature may be losing, but has not lost. This is apparent from the reversions and evolutions of the artificial species, and in particular, the Crakers' development of reverence. Here, then, the point that *Oryx*

¹¹ Margaret Atwood, 'Interview with Margaret Atwood'
<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/atwood/interview.html>

and *Crake* makes using religion is very similar to the secular message of *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* that humans are not omnipotent in relation to nature. However, the representation of MaddAddam and especially God's Gardeners as compared with *Crake* and the transgenicists suggests that reverence is also important as a means of reinforcing this. This means that while *Crakers* do not show any sign of trying to master nature, their religious predisposition, which Snowman directs not only towards their creator but towards a nature deity, may be understood in the novel as a kind of safeguard against what Sharon calls 'interfering with the building blocks of life' (75).

As with gender, one novel is again exceptional in relation to religion: *The Hunter* pays little attention to this theme. Perhaps the concept closest to religion is the environmentalist characters' deep-ecological notion of oneness in which life is a cosmic whole, an idea which they interpret as offering a kind of immortality. However, although M at one point reflects disdainfully on a 'mother rainbow goddess', there is no evidence that the environmentalists worship any deity. A reference to Aboriginal beliefs does appear when Bike, the son in M's host family, talks about hearing a legend at school of how the thylacine earns his stripes (literally) as a mark of bravery for helping a spirit called palanna (78). However, none of the characters in the novel regards legends of the Dreaming as any more than stories. The only sense in which the novel might be understood to engage with Dreaming is in M's attempts to imagine his way into a thylacine body. One meaning of Dreaming, according to Max Charlesworth, is that it refers to the embodiment of the spiritual power of the ancestor heroes in the land, in certain sites, and in species of fauna and flora, so that this power is available to people today... it is through ritual that individuals can enter the spirit world and not only contact the Dreamtime presences but, more, become identified with them.¹²

Thus, when Greg Garrard describes the first moment in which M imagines himself as a thylacine as 'a kind of shamanistic transformation',¹³ he may be correct to read it as ritualistic. M is certainly *not* entering the spirit world of the Dreamtime in the way that

¹² Max Charlesworth, introduction to *Religion in Aboriginal Australia: An Anthology*, ed. Max Charlesworth, Howard Morphy, Diane Bell and Kenneth Maddock (St Lucia, London and New York: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 10.

¹³ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge 2004), 157.

Charlesworth describes, but there may be an analogy at work here. What M actually believes, however, is that his place in life is defined by his participation in a history of human dominance over other species. He shows no signs of being religious, and he does not believe in love or luck but rather in what he calls ‘precision’ as the best means of achieving his goals. Events undermine his positions as he develops affection for the Armstrongs only to lose any opportunity of joining them, but reason and precision do eventually lead him to the thylacine.

With the exception of *Life of Pi*’s avoidance of gender themes and *The Hunter*’s minimal treatment of religion, the recurrence of these two concerns shows how the engagement with animals inflects other major themes in the selected novels. They foreground and often interrogate the association between women and nature, and help to examine how gender relations should change and how religious ideas apply in the context of anti- or posthumanist redefinitions of the human. Taken together with the attention to imperialism or globalisation and anthropocentrism that informs each of these novels, these themes demonstrate the presence of a certain set of shared concerns across their different contexts. The common thread running between them is their exploration of the enduring effects of humanist paradigms on social relations and human-nature relations, and about what it should or could mean for those relationships and human beliefs if those paradigms were effectively dismantled. In all these novels, animals play a central role in the exploration of these ideas, in their capacity as the constitutive other of the humanist construction of the subject.

Animals in white postcolonial literature

In this selection of contemporary literature, then, the relationship between the fictional representation of animals and broader concerns within and beyond the novels makes it clear that, as Marian Scholtmeijer finds in her analysis of animal victims in fiction, ‘the animal *means*’.¹⁴ I want to end by returning to the question of alliance between animals and postcolonialism that has been the focus here to discuss exactly what it is, based on

¹⁴ Marian Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 92.

the analysis in this thesis, that animals do mean for contemporary white postcolonial cultures, and what in turn that means for animals.

The most obvious reason for any literary treatment of species relations – an interest in or concern *for animals* – certainly informs each of the novels examined here. This is not a culturally specific explanation. It is however one that can be inflected by culturally specific concerns. At the outset of this thesis, I raised several possible theories that might explain the attention to animals within white postcolonial literature in particular. These included a displacement of cultural guilt, awareness of connections between anthropocentrism and racism, identification with animals as victims, guilt about colonial human-animal relations, European settler desire for ‘indigeneity’, and the desire to break away from external forms of authority. I now want to return to these explanations and offer some conclusions as to which seem most applicable here.

An explanation that is often given for postcolonial treatments of animals, which has relevance to both white and decolonizing postcolonialism, is animals’ status as victims. One of the ideas raised in the introduction was that animals might function, whether at an acknowledged or unacknowledged level, as substitute objects of atonement in place of previously colonised people. Postcolonial cultural relations tend to be fraught with lasting tensions: decolonising people might express a sense of disinheritance, while white postcolonial people may be reluctant to accept responsibility for their ancestors’ actions. Ironically, because other species do not appear to make claims, because they are considered less important than humans, and because humans everywhere exploit them, to acknowledge guilt in relation to animals might be easier to countenance. However, because it entails a displacement, possibly an unacknowledged one, the explanation of symbolic atonement remains difficult to detect or to prove either way. Whether or not it is a factor in these novels, it also seems unlikely that atonement in relation to animals is *only* symbolic.

A more overt connection with colonised or formerly colonised peoples is an attention to animals as parallels to them. This idea is explored in *Disgrace*, where Coetzee addresses species relations and cultural relations alongside one another and appears to draw parallels between them. Although this approach risks being seen as demeaning Africans by animalisation, likening their situations does not mean equating

people with animals. *Disgrace* arguably criticises both speciesism and racism; the main point of the connection in the novel is that Lucy's view that there is only one life, which we share (74), applies to post-apartheid race relations as well as to species relations. However, as is already clear, *Disgrace* is an exception among the novels addressed here. South African race relations are adjusting to the changes wrought by the end of apartheid, whereas in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, first peoples are outnumbered and current race relations are more stable. It is probably at least partly for that reason that only *Disgrace*, of the five novels examined here, addresses race relations extensively.

Life of Pi's illustration of different animals' ability to cohabit can be seen to parallel Pi's multiculturalism, but this is not made explicit; instead, Pi's teacher suggests that politicians might learn from the animals. In Canada, Pi's cat is named Moccasin (a Native Canadian shoe), but Native Canadians themselves are not mentioned. In the other novels, first peoples are very much on the margins. In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, Fowler Metcalfe is disappointed after basing his idea of New Zealand on pictures of an 'island girl' undressing, but this refers to colonial misconceptions without exploring race relations as such. The only reference to Maori appears in an epigraph, in which Walter Buller supposes that they will die out like the New Zealand robin (119-120). *The Hunter* makes a similar connection, but it is no more extensive. When M finds an old aboriginal fireplace, he recalls reading that De Witt Island was proposed as a 'sanctuary' for the decreasing populations of both Tasmanian Aborigines and thylacines. Otherwise, neither Tasmanian nor any other Aboriginal groups appear. Finally, in *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood presents the west as exploiting other cultures through internet spectacle and Happicuppa's blatant disregard for fair trade. However, the only reference to native North American cultures remains implicit: the Crakers' design appears to be informed by European notions of primitivism and 'the noble savage', which were often associated with Native Americans and Canadians. As in *Disgrace*, then, the association between animals and native cultures usually seems intended to oppose speciesism by underscoring its similarities with racism, but the appearance of bypassing people and prioritising animals is problematic. These writers may not feel that they have to address

race relations just because of their postcolonial status.¹⁵ Alternatively, as discussed in chapter one, avoidance could mean deliberate marginalisation or it could mean wariness of appropriating someone else's story. Race is thus a difficult subject for white writers to address without being accused of insensitivity of one kind or another, and perhaps they are less inclined to enter the territory where it is less urgent. Although parallels with race relations appear in each novel, then, they do not seem to be the main reason for white postcolonial literature's attention to animals.

Another possible explanation for that attention, which again concerns animal victimhood, is raised by Margaret Atwood's suggestion that Canadians 'feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation' and see animals as mirrors of their victimhood.¹⁶ *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *The Hunter* and *Oryx and Crake* all deal with animal extinctions in conjunction with imperialist or globalising threats to postcolonial countries. In Farrell's novel, many New Zealand bird species are about to be destroyed by the importation of European animals by European humans; thus, colonisation is causing animal extinctions. In *The Hunter* too, the priorities of the international biotechnology company override the interests of the thylacine herself, together with the value a live thylacine would have for local humans. In *Oryx and Crake*, habitat loss and climate change have resulted in mass extinction, and the United States, its cities displaced by rising sea levels and temperature, has apparently assimilated Canadian territory and rendered Canada 'extinct'. In three of the five novels, then, an association between the human threat to other species and the sense of an international threat to a postcolonial country does seem to be a factor in the representation of animals.

An alternative view is that the white postcolonial attention to species relations stems instead from a sense of regret in relation to the local treatment of animals, past or present. Atwood dismisses this explanation in favour of the previous one, but it seems important in the novels addressed here, and the two ideas are not incompatible. *Mr*

¹⁵ Atwood defends a similar position in relation to gender: 'I write about women because they interest me, not because I think I ought to. Art created from a sense of obligation is bound to be static'. Margaret Atwood, 'If You Can't Say Something Nice, Don't Say Anything at All,' in *Language in Her Eye: Writing and Gender: Views on Writing and Gender by Canadian Women Writing in English*, ed. Libby Scheier, Sarah Sheard and Eleanor Wachtel (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990), 22.

¹⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), 79.

Allbones' Ferrets and *The Hunter* seem particularly motivated by a sense of regret regarding colonial human-animal relations. *Mr Allbones' Ferrets* reminds the reader of the lamentable actions of colonisers, while *The Hunter*'s re-situation of the thylacine's extinction in the present at once highlights the original tragedy and underscores that such things are just as likely in the present. *Disgrace* is more concerned with contemporary human-animal relations that are of international relevance, but its examples are the plight of unwanted animals in South Africa and Bev's suggestion that the nation's consumption of meat is excessive and unjustifiable. The sense of discomfort at human treatments of animals is less localised in *Life of Pi* and *Oryx and Crake*. *Life of Pi* is critical of 'bad zoos' and makes a very brief reference to humans' 'excessive predatoriness' (29), while in *Oryx and Crake*, this point is extensively exemplified through human-induced climate change and the biotechnological domination of life. Thus, regret about the treatment of animals seems culturally specific in three of the five novels.

What is common to all the explanations explored so far, then, is that they are based on a view of animals as victims. This is probably an essential ingredient in animals' significance; it is certainly a central aspect of human-animal relations in general. In many of these novels, however, it seems equally important for humans to be able to identify with animals in ways that are more positive.

One reason why white postcolonial people might identify with specifically with native animals has to do with the project of establishing 'indigeneity'. Although the sense of displacement is arguably diminishing in some cases, identification with specifically native animals may contribute to the sense of local belonging which Pakeha and white South Africans, Canadians, and Australians have historically struggled to feel. With the exception of *Oryx and Crake* (where few naturally occurring animals appear at all), each of the novels examined here includes animals native to their settings, but they are not always used to access indigeneity. In *Disgrace*, a goat appears at the clinic and a duiker at the Shaws' house, but Lurie does not particularly relate to these animals, and the novel complicates the notion of white South African belonging rather than simplifying it. In *Life of Pi*, Richard Parker's status as a Bengal tiger strengthens his association with Pi, but Pi's Indian status is not in question. The cat called Moccasin is

a light attempt by Pi (and Martel) to connect to the native, but is not a native animal himself. In *Mr Allbones Ferrets* and *The Hunter*, native animals are of course more significant. While Farrell portrays the Pitfords as destructive foreigners, the implication that contemporary Pakeha have a more responsible attitude to native fauna could imply that they have developed a closer relationship to their country. Similarly, in *The Hunter*, the Armstrongs and their friends (who are presumably Australian) try to protect the native flora and fauna, although other locals are hostile to them and they are unsuccessful. Four of the novels, then, include native species as ways of acknowledging location, and two might be seen to assert some degree of local belonging based on responsibility and care for native animals.

The final explanation that I want to address is the one that seems, in these novels, the most frequently significant: whether or not they are victims, and whether they are native or introduced, animals sometimes appear to challenge the Eurocentrism and globalisation against which white postcolonial cultures often seek to define themselves. Animals' foundational position within humanist discourse as an essential other makes them uniquely placed to disrupt it. It is this point, I am suggesting, that is central to their culturally specific significance in these novels, where postcolonial politics, in different ways, involves attempts to undermine at least certain aspects of humanism.

In *Disgrace*, animals contribute to the postcolonial desire for cultural independence from Europe through their impact on Lurie's thinking. His initial views of animals derive from Europe: his animal imagery has much in common with European hunting metaphors, and the theoretical grounds that he offers for human exceptionality come from 'The Church Fathers'. However, through daily contact with animals, Lurie begins to think and act as if humans have responsibilities to them. In his opera, he also breaks away from the norms of the European genre partly by considering including a real dog. In *The Hunter*, the elusiveness of the thylacine forces M to rely on what I have called hunterly empathy. When this overflows into his relationships with the Armstrong family, he finds that he wants to abandon what is a global and globalising existence for one that is rooted in the postcolonial space of Tasmania. In *Life of Pi*, animals' cohabitations with each other and alongside humans in cities can be seen to mirror

human cultural juxtapositions in India and Canada, which Pi and his families in both countries negotiate through cultural hybridity. Animals' surprising qualities also help to invalidate narrow-minded rationality, and this could be seen as a rejection of European values, although Martel does not make this connection explicitly. In *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, the actions of the mustelids and also Eugenia's nightingales demonstrate the limitations of European scientific expertise: they, like the settlers themselves, get out of Europe's control. Finally, animals in *Oryx and Crake* make a similar point in relation to the late twenty-first century. The unexpected actions and developments of various transgenic creatures, especially the pigoons and the Crakers, suggest that even if the human world becomes dominated by a biotechnological élite, science will not achieve omnipotence in relation to nature. In each novel, then, animals offer challenges to imperialistic or globalising as well as anthropocentric ideas or actions on the part of humans.

Overall, then, the appeal that animals seem to hold for white postcolonialism is twofold. They are victims not just of anthropocentrism but also of the imperialistic or globalising forces against which white postcolonial cultures seek to define themselves, yet they also display some power to resist those forces, thus becoming models for or allies in that project.

However, if this is the only reason to include them, this raises questions about the politics of harnessing animals, if only conceptually, to these ends. The association being made between postcolonial cultural issues and animals in *Disgrace*, *Life of Pi*, *Mr Allbones' Ferrets*, *The Hunter* and *Oryx and Crake* can be interpreted in different ways, depending on whether or not one concern is subordinated to the other, a question that is related to the politics of literature more generally, since authors necessarily 'use' whatever they include in a text for their own purposes. The juxtaposition of two themes like post-apartheid and species politics can entail a literary instance of Plumwood's definition of instrumentalism, where one concern is treated as a means to the ends of another.¹⁷ In literary representations of animals, instrumentalism might be said to occur where they function only as similes, metaphors, or symbols, as in Lurie's abstractions in the first part of *Disgrace*, while the realities of animals' lives are passed over as

¹⁷ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 142.

irrelevant; in other words, if they become what Carol Adams calls absent referents. Another possibility is that the experiences of animals might serve primarily to illustrate human concerns; their representation as fellow victims, when they are only that, would also come into this category. A non-fictional example of this is Wolfe's somewhat Kantian suggestion that the discourse of speciesism be dismantled in order to neutralise animalising language in relation to humans.¹⁸ Conversely, cultural relations might be used as an instrument for advancing species politics, as in Derrida's and, in *The Lives of Animals*, Elizabeth Costello's analogies between the exploitation of animals and the Holocaust.¹⁹ However, as Coetzee emphasises via other characters' responses to Costello, this inversion of the first approach also inverts the problem, and can be seen to prioritise other animals over the victims of racism, even though the concept is premised on anti-racism.

However, most of the novels addressed here are closer to Plumwood's definition of non-instrumental use, in terms of both cultural and species considerations. Within fiction, any concept is, necessarily, appropriated to human ends, but this is not always instrumentalist. Plumwood explains that in non-instrumental use,

even where the other's agency is overridden by the user's own in the process of bringing it into use, it is acknowledged as more than a means to these ends, as an independent centre of striving which places limits on the self and on the kinds of use which may be made of it.²⁰

This definition arguably applies to cultural and human-animal relations in literature when, in addition to reflecting one another, these issues are each represented as important in themselves. Thus, while animals serve white postcolonial cultural ends in the ways just described, the novels also work to promote animal interests.

Disgrace is perhaps the most obviously concerned with both cultural and species politics; the two connect through implicit parallels but each is a major concern of the novel. In terms of animals, Coetzee questions, via a character who is initially very

¹⁸ Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7-8.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),' trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* 28, 2 (2002): 394-95. J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 19-22, 49-50.

²⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 142.

sceptical about animal welfare, the acceptability of perhaps the two most common aspects of human-animal relations: the keeping and rejection of companion animals, and the production and consumption of meat. These are localised issues in the novel, but their relevance is not. *Disgrace* explicitly confronts perceptions of animals and urges its readers to reflect on them: Lucy says to Lurie, ‘What would you prefer... that you needn’t think about it? ...Wake up’ (124). *Life of Pi*, as I have suggested, uses animals for anti-rationalist but otherwise humanist ends, yet in doing so, it fosters human curiosity about and liking for animals, and a desire for contact with more than just companion species. It also presents the idea of sharing human spaces (like cities) with animals as unproblematic through Pi’s attempts to counter the unease that zoo escapes inspire. Thus, although *Life of Pi* does not question humanist perceptions of animals, it does promote positive ones. *Mr Allbones’ Ferrets*, *The Hunter* and *Oryx and Crake* all present colonisation or globalisation and the threat to animal species as different effects of the same imperialistic processes. *Mr Allbones’ Ferrets* and *The Hunter*, of course, concentrate on promoting a conservationist ethic. On the one hand, the interrogation of human-animal relations here seems less radical than that of *Disgrace*, because there is already a general consensus that endangered animals should be protected. Yet on the other hand, this aspect of human-animal relations seems the most urgent. Leigh’s approach arguably has most impact in this respect, because she appeals to both biocentric and ecocentric perspectives at once in personalising the thylacine’s extinction through an individual animal, whom even M mourns at the moment of her death. In *Oryx and Crake*, the exacerbation of ethno- and anthropocentrism are both symptoms of widespread apocalypse. The novel touches on multiple problems in human-animal relations. Like *Disgrace*, it addresses meat-eating, presenting it not so much as unethical as unsustainable, although the ChickieNobs raise questions about acceptable production practices. There is also a brief engagement with the ethics of keeping companion animals, when Sharon decides that Killer will be happier in the wild. Meanwhile, like *Mr Allbones’ Ferrets* and *The Hunter*, *Oryx and Crake* interrogates the scientific manipulation of animals, and highlights the threat of mass extinction. Overall, the novel presents human interference with nature as unethical and possibly self-destructive.

In these ways, the connections between white postcolonial literary aims and animal interests in these novels can all be regarded as promoting animal interests as well as cultural ones. While humanist values cannot simply be made to disappear, the representation of animals in all five of the selected novels fosters positive attitudes towards them, including admiration, love, care and protection, reverence and perhaps co-operation. These attitudes are set against humanist categorising, and in four of the five cases, against the privileging of humans at the expense of the literal and conceptual sacrifice of animals.

This suggests that, at a discursive level, white postcolonial discourse can contribute to animal studies as well as the reverse. The most significant commonality between the two fields, of course, is their engagement with questions of similarity and difference. Animal studies is often regarded as the latest step in a series of discourses of liberation that has struggled (in different orders in different locations) for decolonization, black civil rights, women's rights and homosexual rights. Whether or not animal studies scholarship is concerned with animal rights (some is and some is not), questions about the negotiation of difference are central to it. What white postcolonial discourse can contribute to this is its experience of trying to break away not just from a dominant culture but from one's own culture. Whereas decolonizing postcolonial people in South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia also seek definition against the west, there is less confusion about what the distinctions are. White postcolonial cultures, by contrast, have had to define the distinctions for themselves. To this extent, white postcolonial discourse could offer useful models for the attempt within some animal studies discourse to decentre the *anthropos* and to forge new understandings of species relations.

All of these novels, then, support but elaborate on Scholtmeijer's observation that animals 'mean' within contemporary literature. Lurie asks himself, in *Disgrace*, whether he can include a dog in his opera, and the novels I have addressed all answer in the affirmative. Moreover, although Scholtmeijer suggests that the fact *that* animals mean in fiction is more important than *what* they mean, what they mean is surely the next most important question, and analysis of their representation within these texts suggests that, whatever other concerns they reflect, animals also mean *themselves*. To

this extent, the alliance proposed by Philip Armstrong between postcolonial and animal studies discourses based on humanism as a common antagonist is being made in white postcolonial literature, and it does work to advance both interests. Although novels face obstacles in effecting it, including the dangers of ‘the dreaded comparison’ and of offering too much or too little hope, the fiction genre, as ever, functions as a forum in which to explore ways of negotiating such challenges, without, necessarily, positing answers.

In conclusion, perhaps the perspective offered by the project undertaken here can best be described as a snapshot. On the one hand, the focus is narrow. These particular texts are all representing animals as offering of resistance to aspects of humanism, and seem to regard animals as potential allies in a collaboration of sorts. This might suggest the existence of a certain trend, but it certainly does not mean that it applies to white postcolonial literature in general. Beyond the frame, however, the literature being addressed here connects outward to its broader cultural and historical context, and it is this point, I think, which explains the prevalence of species themes within the relatively short time period (1999-2007) under discussion here. These novels participate in and reflect the increasing attention currently being paid to questions of humans’ impact upon other species and the environment in general. On this level as well as for more culturally specific reasons, they contribute to the ongoing attempts to dismantle the humanist figure of Man, which remains dominant at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this way, these novels attempt to answer again, for their own time, the ‘question’ of humans and animals’ relation to one another.

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